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BIANCA CAPPELLO.

"A woman's fate lies in a cloud
'Twixt heaven and earth."

UNPUBLISHED PLAY.

"There is a lesson in every life, and warning in too many."
Capt. Maryatt's Poor Jack.

BIANCA CAPPELLO.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

LADY LYTTON BULWER,

AUTHOR OF "CHEVELEY."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BIANCA CAPPELLO.

CHAPTER I.

“ How wisdom and folly meet, mix, and unite,
How virtue and vice blend their black and their white.”

BURNS.

“ His humour is lofty, his discourse peremptory—
His tongue filed, his eye ambitious, his gait majestical,
And his general behaviour vain, ridiculous,
And thrasonical.”—SHAKESPEARE.

IT was a fine autumnal morning, at about half past ten o'clock, when Ignatius Dragoni was wending his way to the Louvre, through the dark, narrow, and withal dirty, Rue de Pavia, Rue du Pomme d'Or, and Rue Colbert, with their wooden-beamed, red-tiled, and gable-end houses, rendered still more uncouth by the excrecence of a low shop projecting from each ; which, shut up nightly within a wooden cover, and fastened with an iron chain and padlock,

gave to Old Paris a very different appearance, to the lofty elegance of the present façades and colonades, and its balmy Tuillerie gardens, counteracting, with their fragrant toilette of sweet flowers, in some slight degree, the pestilential vapours of the streets. Still, even in those days, the Parisians, within a walk of their dark streets, had their ‘guinguettes,’ their lemonade, and their laugh; and if a grisette’s pointed hat appeared in the wooden balcony, or her foot on the external flight of wooden stairs, of her house, the one was sure to have a smarter ribbon, and the other to be better shod, than were the ladies of the landed squires at the other side of the channel. The massacre of the Calvinists was a matter of too ordinary occurrence, to interrupt either the business or the amusements of the Parisians, and the tumult that could succeed in bringing them to their windows, which had only the shedding of Protestant blood for its origin, was sure to see them turn away again in the same instant with a disappointed exclamation of—‘ Oh ce n’est que des Huguenots !’—It is only some Huguenots!—while to see the ‘coche’ of the queen-mother, or of the Duchesse de Valentinois, (much less to see both together, as sometimes happened when they met in a narrow street, and one was obliged to give way

to the other, by backing out to let the rival equipage pass), was sure to convoke a marvelling crowd, that did not disperse under half an hour. It was through one of these crowds that the Jesuit was now making his way,—having got on the steps of a house to avoid being splashed by the lumbering vehicle of Diana of Poietiers, which had just passed, and left every door-way and window full, gazing after its ponderous splendours! Though it was more than a year since he had been attacked, and his arm broken, on his way from Belriguardo, by Vittorio Cappello's men, yet Ignatius thought his complaint and appeal for an order to search the Château de Luillac would have a better effect with the aid of a sling than without, therefore he still retained it, and was in the act of saving the arm that it bore from the contact of a horse's head, when he looked up and perceived the Marquis de Millepropos, who was himself riding to court, to resign the patents of his appointment as ambassador at Venice. There was in the splendour of the Marquis's dress to the full as much of the foppery of a lover as the gorgeousness of a courtier, and as he passed, the air became redolent of '*rose musquée*,' from the perfumed gloves with which he caressed his beard, and the broidered kerchief with which he kept

warding off the common flies and the common air. He now turned round, and desired his equerry to ride forward, and await him at the gate of the Louvre ; after which, he reined in his horse, and drew up under a wooden balcony, from which was suspended the sign of a gilt embroidery frame, while within it appeared the following affiche :—

“ Fanchette Blondelle, Brodeuse en or et en soie ; Brèveté de sa Majesté la Reine Mère, et la Reine d’Ecosse.”

“ Ho ! demoiselle Fanchette,” said the Marquis, looking up, “ Is my suit finished yet ?”

“ It would appear not, or even taken into consideration,” chuckled a young shoemaker, the humble, but at the same time successful, rival of the Marquis, as he sat finishing a pair of holiday slippers for this said demoiselle Fanchette before his own shop door ; the heels of which ‘ pantoufles ’ were, at least, half an inch higher than any other heels in Paris, not excepting the queen-mother’s.

“ Demoiselle Fanchette,” re-echoed the Marquis, “ have you nothing for me ?”

At this second appeal, an upper lattice opened, and a dimpled red mouth, with a very ‘ espiègle ’ pair of laughing dark eyes, appeared at it ; while the hand belonging to these lips and eyes held a vase of faded flowers ; and

taking a deliberate and too unerring aim, this wicked little hand hurled the whole of the unfragrant contents of the vase at the head of the devoted Marquis ; and then, seeking its companion, they began wringing themselves in apparent despair, as she exclaimed,

“ ‘ Oh mille pardons, Monsieur le Marquis,’ I really did not see you.”

“ ‘ Ah sacré mille pestes,’ ” cried the Marquis, removing his hat, and vehemently shaking the unwelcome bouquet from him. “ And you,” continued he, espying Ignatius, who stood directly under the window, “ you have not got one of them !”—and his looks said as plainly as any words could have done, it would have been some consolation if you had.

“ Non, Seigneur,” said the Jesuit, with a sly smile, bowing to the Marquis’s youthful dress, “ fortune, like other women, favours only the young !” (Ignatius was at least ten years younger than the Marquis.)

“ ‘ Morbleu ! mon père, vous avez raison ; mais cela me coute toujours une toilette,’ ” said the Marquis de Millepropos, turning his horse’s head towards his own hôtel, and casting a mingled look of reproach and expostulation at Demoiselle Fanchette, who still stood at the window, bending the empty flower vase down in the direction of the ill-fated marquis ; while

between herself and Etienne Péault, the before-mentioned young shoemaker, there was carrying on a very brisk correspondence, ‘via’ (what Mr. Bob Fudge, in our own times, has so appropriately designated “*the two-penny post of the eyes.*”) Ignatius had known quite enough of the Marquis de Millepropos’ amatory misadventures at Venice, not to smile at the species of fortune that still seemed to attend him; though his untiring and undaunted perseverance would have done honour to a better cause, while in that of the mischievous little deity, at whose shrine he persisted in worshiping, it only made him ridiculous.

As the Jesuit was about to turn out of the rue Colbert, and cross the then rude wooden bridge leading to the Louvre, his ears were assailed with loud cries of “Down with the Heretic!” and missiles, including stones, and other hard substances, flew in all directions. In turning to discover the object of the mob’s vengeance, Ignatius perceived Théodore de Bèze, (better known by his Latinized name of Beza), one of the early disciples of Calvin, with whom the Cardinal de Lorraine had had a controversy some three years before, in what the French then termed “The famous Colloquy of Poissi,” at the time when Catherine de Medici, with a faint show of justice, had pro-

posed public controversies as a medium through which the Papal and Calvinistic factions might settle their differences, either by forsaking or reconciling their hostile tenets. But as, unfortunately for himself, Théodore de Bèze was considered, in public opinion, to have had the best of it in the ‘Poissi’ dispute with the Cardinal, Lainez the general of the Jesuits never forgave him, and always had a sufficient number of his emissaries in the streets of every town in France, to raise a hue and cry after the reformer wherever and whenever he appeared. Upon the morning in question, De Bèze seemed doubly obnoxious,—for the “head and front of his offence” was with him, as he carried in his hand the unmutilated Book of God,—having been to read prayers to a dying cousin of the Admiral de Coligni, who had been content to forfeit her earthly possessions (in support of her newly embraced faith) to the same treachery which afterwards betrayed her illustrious cousin, and his equally illustrious friend, the Prince de Condé, when they were guilty of the weakness of believing in the fair promises of Catherine de Medici. Théodore de Bèze was a mild, middle-aged looking man, devoid of every species of *charlatanism*, even the most subtle, because the most infectious of all,—that of enthusiasm. He seemed indeed to

hold himself wholly and solely as a follower of “One, whose shoe latchet he was not worthy to loosen;” and if *his* words, when he preached them, with their divine eloquence of *truth*, failed to convince, he had not the presumption to suppose that the verbiage of human sophistry could succeed.

“Good friends,” said De Bèze, warding off, without, at the same time, making any great effort to do so, the missiles that were assailing him, “Say, that you trample my body to atoms, what good will it do you? and what harm will it do me? On the contrary, all the loss will be yours, and all the gain mine: for you seem to take a pleasure in hooting and pelting me, and that pleasure you will assuredly lose, when you lose me. Whereas, when I go hence, I shall see God, and see you no more.”

“Hear how he talks!” shouted one of the mob; and the words were immediately echoed by the rest,—“Hear how he talks! A heretic see God!”

“And why not *his* God, Maitre Laurent?” hiccupped a drunken publican, “the devil is the God of the Huguenots; true, I assure you, the Archbishop told us so last Sunday.”

Ignatius, whose bigotry was only political, and to whom the Catholic religion was synonymous with the power of Spain, and the order

of Loyola *one* with the advancement of Ignatius Dragoni, admired, in spite of himself, the mild dignity of the Calvinist, and, turning to the mob, as he protectingly laid his hand on Théodore's arm, he addressed them in his behalf.

"Ho, Father! you a Jesuit, and take part with a Calvinist; 'fi done!' Know you not that your General says they are all monkeys, monsters, and foxes? and are such fit to be let loose?"

"I do not want to let them loose," replied Ignatius, "on the contrary, I am going to the Louvre, and would take this man with me, to learn the royal pleasure concerning him; but I object to all street brawls and violence, for they are things which do the cause of our holy religion so much harm."

"A fine doctrine, truly," shrugged Maître Laurent, who appeared the orator among the mob; "I suppose we shall be told next that it injures our health to burn faggots in our hearths; and how pray are we to warm our public squares without a few heretics to make a blaze? a man's hearth is but a private matter after all; but the flame in the 'Carfour' is for the public good, and, 'Vogue la galère!' it must not want fuel."

“‘Vive Maître Laurent !’ he speaks reason !” shouted the mob.

“Come, come,” cried Ignatius, throwing a few gold pieces among the rabble, which produced more effect upon them than even Maître Laurent’s orthodox eloquence ; although that worthy now stood with his bare arms resolutely folded, and his blue woollen Dacian-shaped cap, placed on one side with an air of defiance. “Come, come ! I am no heretic or partisan of heretics, as this dress of my sacred order may attest” (and here he crossed himself devoutly) ; “but let the law mete out its own penalties ; it better behoves peaceable citizens, and good Catholics, to pray for the souls of the deluded, than to pelt their bodies ; or even to drain a wine-flask in drinking better sense to them.”

“The good father is right,” now vociferated public opinion, as that disinterested and impartial organ scrambled for the Jesuit’s gold, which having found, they determined to pay him the compliment of adopting the latter part of his advice, by repairing to a neighbouring wine-shop, and there drinking to the conversion of the Calvinist. Maître Laurent alone stood his ground, and budged not ; but even he could not resist the voice of friendship, as it said to him, with an accompanying nudge, ‘Allons boire’—let us go drink !

The narrow street was soon cleared, except of its ordinary passengers; and Théodore de Bèze turned to Ignatius, and thanked him for his assistance.

"And now," added he, with a faint smile, "I would offer you my hand, but that to be seen on such friendly terms with a Calvinist, might bring upon you the suspicion of the Inquisition; and to be suspected in this world is far more dangerous than to be guilty. So now farewell, for should Lainez be at the Louvre, as most probably he will, his displeasure might not stop at words when he saw you so accompanied."

"Nay," said Ignatius, "our General's zeal may be hot, that I do not deny; but you must not believe all the calumnies of the rabble, for that many-headed monster the mob, in seeking to adorn, generally disfigures its idols; and I am sure had Lainez been in my place this morning he would have acted as I did."

De Bèze shook his head, with an incredulous smile; and the Jesuit continued:—

"Besides, I do not consider that you are in safety unless by accompanying me to the Louvre, whither I am obliged to go, you have me for an escort."

"Well, then, to the Louvre be it," said the Calvinist; "I fear to meet no man; though

for your protection I accept it as frankly as it is offered."

"And yet," pursued Ignatius, in answer to his own thoughts, as he drew from his bosom the splendidly illuminated copy of Maximus Theophilus's edition of the Bible, which he had brought as a present to Catherine de Medici, "I verily believe the Queen mother does not set one whit more value upon this volume, than on the one you hold in your hand; for she is accused of being too tolerant to those of your persuasion."

"I believe also," replied Théodore de Bèze, with a faintly contemptuous smile, "that she has no prejudices either way; astrology being her only creed, inasmuch as that in it she places her whole trust."*

* The astrological mania that Catherine de Medici brought with her from Florence, infected the court of France for four succeeding reigns. Even the enlightened historian De Thou, shared in this superstition. Henry the Fourth of France had his son's horoscope drawn. The court of Mary de Medicis was filled with impostors, pretending to the art of divination; and at the disgraceful trial of Galigai Concini, in the reign of Louis the Thirteenth, when she was asked by the Judge with what sorceries she had succeeded in subjugating the mind of the Queen mother, she replied, "De l'ascendant qu'un esprit supérieur a toujours sur un esprit foible;" but she was burnt nevertheless.

The Jesuit relapsed into silence, in which they both continued till they reached the Louvre, where, among divers gaily dressed pages, and well-mounted equerries, sat the Marquis de Millepropos's squire, finishing the second nap he had indulged in that morning while waiting for his master.

"How is this," said Ignatius; "here are two staircases, one opposite the other, only there are no guards before this one on the left, and I do not know which we ought to go up, never having been here before."

"This way, this way, to the right, 'mon père,'" said a court page. "Those were the stairs leading to the Queen Mary Stuart's apartments; but since she has gone to England, they have been shut up, and no guards are kept at the door."

The Jesuit thanked the boy, and with his companion ascended the wide staircase before them, on each landing of which were four men in armour; but in the first ante-room was a guard, composed of about a hundred nobles, (like the Guardia Nobile at Florence). Their dress consisted of bright steel armour, with gold rivets, over which they wore a tunic of scarlet velvet. The plumes of their helmets (which were also of polished steel) were snow white, but fastened at the base, with small scarlet

ones disposed in the form of a fleur-de-lys.* Passing through this ante-room, they reached another, where a sort of band, or more properly speaking, orchestra, were playing several of the monotonous pieces of the time, when the science of music was in its infancy, and consequently its sounds were shrill, feeble, and discordant. Before an organ, sat, with up-turned sightless eyes, the most celebrated ‘maestro’ (next to Palestrina) of the sixteenth century, a Spaniard by birth, and Francesco Salinas† by name. Near him stood wrapt, in a kind of breathless attention, a youth of about fifteen, François Eustache du Caurroy, whom his contemporaries afterwards styled “ le Prince des

* Red lilies are the city arms of Florence.

† Salinas was a native of Burgos, and having been born blind, his attention was directed to music by his parents. By an Andalusian lady, whom he taught to play on the organ, he was instructed in Latin, and became so enamoured of its literature, that he was sent to Salamanca, where he acquired a knowledge of Greek literature and philosophy. Here he was introduced to Peter Sarmentus, Archbishop of Compostella, who took him under his protection. Many years after this, after having made his name celebrated at most continental courts, he was appointed professor of music at his own university. In the “History of Music,” he is cited as an admirable performer on the organ, and as better acquainted with the science of music, and the works of his predecessors, than any other person of his day.

Professeurs de Musique," and who, even at that early age, considering the backwardness of the science itself, evinced singular proficiency. The rest of the orchestra was composed of viol de gambas, sackbutts, virginals, and citherns, played by those (then) celebrated Netherland professors, les Sieurs Gombert, Jacket Berghem, Clemens non Papa, Cipriano de Rore, Orlando di Lasso, and Josquin des Prés.* Ignatius waited for a pause in the music, and then as he passed him, placed his hand upon Salinas's shoulder.

" Speak," said the latter in a mild voice, " that I may know thee, for my ears have many acquaintances—my eyes, alas! none."

" Nay, Master Francis, you send such sweet friends to the ears of others, that 'tis but fair yours should have many in return."

" Ha! Father Ignatius," cried Salinas, rising

* Adami calls the grandfather of this Des Prés, "Uomo insigne per l'inventione." He was 'Maestro di Capello' to Louis the Twelfth of France, and was promised a benefice by that monarch. The promise was, however, forgotten; but Josquin being commanded to compose a motett for the chapel royal, chose this verse from the 119th Psalm, "Memor esto verbi tui servo tuo." The music was much admired, and brought the promised gift; after which he composed a song of thanksgiving from the words, "Bonitatem fecisti cum servo tuo, Domine."

and clasping the Jesuit's hand in both of his—“what news from Spain, good friend? How fares it with the king?”

“Well,—at least so herald his own letters, for it is some time since I have been at Madrid.”

“Then, perchance, you may not have heard of his gracious present to me? A new organ, the finest that ever echoed to human touch;—but heaven only knows,” added the poor musician with a sigh, “whether I shall live to play on it before him; for I have felt ill of late, and 'tis but a churlish climate after ours, this France, though the natives do call it ‘*La belle France*,’ and say that the young Queen of Scots shed a sea of tears to leave.”

“Cheer up, Master Francis, and keep thine organ in good humour, to glad Philip’s ears, one little month from this, when he comes to Bayonne with his queen, to meet her royal brother of France,” said Ignatius.

“Indeed! Well, that is a goodly hearing; but to think that I should have spoken to you for five minutes, and not yet felicitated you on your brave rescue of Don Manuel, at Venice! Nothing else was talked of at Madrid for a month? and the King gave a banquet in honour of it. 'Fore Jove, but those Venetians must owe you a grudge!”

“ On the contrary,” replied the Jesuit, drily, “ it is I who am still in their debt ; but I am an honest man, as you know, Master Francis, and if it please heaven to spare my life, they shall be paid.”

Salinas was about to reply, when a scuffle at the door attracted every one’s attention.

“ Indeed, Monsieur le Marquis, what you ask is impossible,” said one of the pages. Were it the Cardinal de Lorraine, or the Duc de Guise himself, I have her Majesty’s orders that no one be admitted to the entrée to-day till her conference be ended with a signor who arrived last night from Florence.”

“ Refuse *me!* a man of *my* rank, the entrée ! ” cried the Marquis de Millepropos, breaking from the page, and fanning himself vehemently with his pocket handkerchief as he entered the room,—“ and then, the ignorant jackanapes, to place *me* below the Lorraines and Guises ! I’d have you to know, sirrah, that the Millepropos have always been the foremost family in France—especially in polities. Beside, rascal ! I am an ambassador ! —his Majesty’s representative ! —an ambassador ! —an ambassador ! an ambassador ! Do you understand that, varlet ? ”

“ I perfectly understand that you *were* an ambassador,” replied the page with the most

provoking ‘sang froid,’ and a still more provoking smile, “but I believe it is precisely to resign that office that Monsieur le Marquis now presents himself at the Louvre?”

“Insolent!” muttered the Marquis,—now fanning himself with the frail tenure of his glory, the identical letters patent he was so soon about to lay at the feet of the King.—“My family—but every one in France knows the Millepropos! What were France without them? Mine is truly noblesse! And pray,” continued the Marquis de Millepropos, clenching his hand at the page with what he conceived to be an air of calm dignity, “how long is this signor from Florence, as you call him, to be with her Majesty?”

“That is more than any one can tell; but the Sieur Amiot, who saw him enter, and who it appears knows him, said, he was a very distinguished personage, and a great astrologer: so that you may thank your stars if the conference ends these two hours.

“Ah, those cursed astrologers!” exclaimed the Marquis, “no doubt it is they who have poisoned the queen’s mind against me,—and yet,” added he, arranging his ruff, caressing his chin, and raising himself on the points of his feet, “I have always been true to my country; for, remembering that Catherine de Medici was

great as a queen, I never allowed myself to be seduced into taking advantage of any weakness she may have betrayed as a woman ; and yet I am no longer in favour ! ‘ Parbleu ! Voilà peut-être le pourquoi ! ’ ”

The titter which this speech of the Marquis had given rise to had scarcely subsided, when the door leading to the presence chamber opened : a chamberlain announced, that all those awaiting an audience in the ante-room might pass on ; and, as he did so, a man, of a tall and dignified bearing, dressed in black velvet, and bowing graciously to the right and to the left, walked through, and made his exit at the outer door. It seemed to Ignatius, as he gazed after him, that he had seen him before,—but he had not time to recollect where, when he was hurried on with the crowd to the presence chamber, having only time to say to Salinas, “ Master Francis, you must dine with me to-day, at this far-famed ordinary that I have heard so much of, the ‘ Champ du drap d’or.’ So await my coming, and I will shorten the time as much as possible.”

CHAPTER II.

“ Like a fine bragging youth : and tell quaint lies
 How honourable ladies sought my love,
 Which I denying, they fell sick and died.”

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

“ The King leans from his chamber, from his balcony on high,
 What means this furious clamour my palace porch so nigh?”

LOCKHART'S SPANISH BALLADS.

WHEN the Jesuit and Théodore de Bèze, together with the Marquis de Millepropos, and others who had been waiting in the ante-room, reached the presence chamber, they found the young King; his preceptor, Amiot; Michel de l'Hôpital, the virtuous chancellor, as he was deservedly called; the Maréchal de Retz; the Cardinal de Châtillon (whose Calvinistic tenets had been too openly avowed in the preceding reign, to gain him more than an ungracious toleration at the present court); Henri le Balafré, and other officers of state, and members of the royal household; but the queen mother had not yet appeared. The

throne room was a large, lofty apartment, with a music gallery running round it, supported by pillars of white Carrara marble, with richly gilt Corinthian capitals;—the arabesque iron railing of the gallery was also gilt. The walls were hung with gold arras, and ornamented with a profusion of the rarest and most costly armour, comprising gold and silver shields, greaves, and helmets, the cunning and unrivalled handicraft of Benvenuto Cellini, which had been left there since the time of Francis the First. More civilized France had even then her inlaid, though unpolished, oak floors, which were much pleasanter to walk upon than either the marble ones of Italy, or the rush-strewed ones of England. The throne was situated at the upper end of the room, on a dais of three steps, covered with violet-coloured velvet, fringed with gold; on the upper step, or landing of which, were two carved and richly-gilt throne chairs, also covered with violet velvet,—one vacant, belonging to the Queen Mother, and the other occupied, though certainly not filled, by Charles the Ninth. The young King was a sickly looking boy of fifteen, with his mother's dark eye and brow,—but there the likeness ended, for the repose of his countenance was more that of vacancy than thought. His frame was so slight, that the

heavy dress of the time,—at least that worn by most princes and great men, namely, a sort of half armour, half velvet, suit,—seemed to oppress him, though made of the lightest materials that the fashion would admit, for his was composed of bright silver chain armour, with a tunic of sapphire-coloured velvet, and, instead of a ruff, he indulged in the luxury of a falling collar of ‘point d’Alençon,’ the cord and tassels of which were composed of small brilliants. Near him, on his right hand, stood a chime of musical bells: this instrument was in a silver frame, of about the height of a modern Psyche, or cheval glass, but only half the width; an arch of the same metal went from one pillar to another, and from within this arch hung nine large-sized silver bells, but of different gradations, from which, music, though not “most eloquent,” was “discoursed,” by striking them with two small silver hammers, both of which the King now held in his right hand. It was evident that, previous to the entrance of the persons from the ante-room, His Majesty had been solacing himself, and delighting his courtiers, with this charming amusement; for, whenever a nudge from the Maréchal de Retz, or a look from Amiot, warned him to attend to a presentation (which he got through by the short and royal road, of

hoping they were well? if Frenchmen; and that they liked France? if foreigners), he would turn shortly round and give a sly tap to his dear bells, till again reminded by another look from the amiable and benevolent Aniot, that he must attend to metal *less* attractive; then an angry flash would gleam from his dark eye on his gentle and, in spite of all that was done to prevent it, even by him, much-loved preceptor, that seemed to say, “Have you not love enough to bear with me, when that rash humour, which my mother gave me, makes me forgetful?”

And while the honest tutor would turn away and deprecatingly shake his head, the wily and serpent-like de Retz, would pityingly shrug his shoulders, and push the bells nearer to the King; for it was nothing to him how unpopular the boy made himself,—nay, the more the country was disturbed, the better, for the more his counsels would be needed. But Charles, with the waywardness of a spoiled child on the present occasion, pushed the bells away, and said, with a pettish sarcasm, that seemed too strong for the feeble lips that uttered it—

“Thank you, Maréchal; when you sigh for further honours, we will create you ‘Prince of the Bells!’”

De Retz bit his lip, and repressed a frown as

he bowed low, and replied : “ I should be guilty of treason were I to reject anything your Highness offered me—even an insult—therefore, I shall treasure this.”

While this scene was passing on the steps of the throne, Ignatius advanced with Théodore de Bèze to where the Chancellor was standing. Both Michel de l'Hôpital's character and appearance were worthy of the Roman Senate in its palmiest days ; in his lifetime even he had achieved that greatest of all fame, the praise of his opponents. As soon as the Jesuit had explained to him how he had rescued De Bèze from the assaults of the mob, he added—

“ And so I ventured to bring him hither, and now place him at the disposal of the Chancelier de l'Hôpital, whose virtues every one is acquainted with, if even, like me, they have the misfortune not to be personally acquainted with their possessor.”

“ If you are good enough to think *that* a misfortune,” said Michel de L'Hôpital, extending his hand to Ignatius, “ it is one that I can end on the moment, as I shall be happy to accept your friendship ; but for your compliments, I must disclaim them. We live in crooked, dark times, father—hence my renown ; for we all know that the humblest light shines out brightly in the midst of darkness. For you,

‘mon ami,’ ” said he, turning to Théodore de Bèze, “ I am truly sorry ; would to God that our countrymen could be persuaded to abandon those firebrand soubriquets of Calvinist, Lutheran, Huguenot, Heretic, and Papist, and only glory in, and act up to, the great name of Christian. Luckily for you, friend, Lainez is not here, and the Duc de Guise, unhappily for us, but happily for you, is away at these dreadful civil wars that are devastating our poor country ; and her Majesty has not yet come from the council ; therefore I should advise you to profit by the escort of the Cardinal de Châtillon, who, I see, is about to depart. With him you will be safe ; for, as Lainez says, his red hat covers his black heresies.”

“ I thank you, Monseigneur,” said Théodore de Bèze ; “ but having come here as a victim, I will not steal away like a thief, but even await her Majesty’s pleasure, and trust to her clemency.”

The Chancelier shook his head, and whispered into the Calvinist’s ear, “ Put not thy trust in princes.”

“ I do not,” replied the latter aloud ; “ but I do in the Ruler of princes !”

Ignatius, who had on the previous evening sent the letters he had brought from Philip of

Spain and Francesco de Medici, to the Queen Mother, now received a message through a chamberlain, saying that her Majesty would see him in her closet; so bowing to the Chancelier, and bidding Théodore de Bèze await his return, he quitted the throne-room, and followed the chamberlain.

“ I wish to goodness the Queen Mother would come ! ” said the young Comte de Saint-André, son of the Maréchal of that name.

Impatient as the young Comte was for the Queen Mother’s appearance, he had to wait full three quarters of an hour for that event; at the end of which time the doors opened at the upper end of the presence-chamber, at the right-hand side of the throne, and, preceded by a numerous suite of ladies, Catherine de Medici entered, Ignatius walking beside her, with whom she was conversing, apparently much pleased with whatever tidings he had communicated to her. In her features were the remains more of comeliness than beauty; her forehead was high and intellectual, her brows low and straight, her eyes were of so dark a blue as to appear black; her nose was aquiline, her lips full, her chin heavy, and her whole face, though of a well-formed oval, yet on too large a scale for female beauty. Her figure was stately and

commanding, and large without ‘embonpoint;’ but the dress she wore on the present occasion was particularly becoming to her, being an emerald green velvet, made in the Mary Stuart form, round the epaulettes of which were twisted rows of large diamonds, while down the robings were bunches of lily of the valley, done in emeralds and pearls, but eclipsed by a ‘cordelier,’ that was a perfect gallery of jewels;—the compartments of her standing ruff were divided by long branches of fusia, composed of rubies and brilliants, and attached to the ruff by means of slides at the back, by which they were sewn, so that every time she moved the refraction of the prismatic colours of the precious stones seemed to circle her like a sprinkling rainbow. Her hair (on which the snows of time had not yet fallen) was turned back on a roll, and surmounted by a ‘rezzilia,’ or Mary Stuart cap, of green velvet, with a network of small pearls over the back or cawl, while round the front was a row of large brilliants, every sixth diamond being divided by a large pear-shaped pearl. Her hand was particularly beautiful, a fact of which she seemed perfectly aware, judging from two circumstances, one being the conspicuous manner in which she let it hang listlessly over the side of the throne as

she took her seat ; the other was its freedom from rings, notwithstanding that the tyranny of fashion in those days enjoined so many. Instead of turned-up pointed cuffs of ‘point d’Alençon,’ she had, in imitation of the lace, mural crowns, of emeralds and brilliants, of about six inches high, which certainly appeared more worthy of the beautiful hands they surmounted, than manchettes of mere lace, however costly it might be.

No sooner was the Queen Mother seated, and had made a sort of circular bow to all those near the throne, than Ignatius whispered in the ear of Théodore de Bèze—

“ Fear nothing, I have obtained a ‘ passe-partout’ from the Queen for you.”

The Marquis de Millepropos was the first to advance to the foot of the throne, and bowing profoundly, with the letters patent between both his hands clasped under his chin, he said, in a voice intended to be deeply pathetic, turning first towards the King, and then towards Catherine—

“ These patents, which your Majesties were once so graciously pleased to confer on your unworthy, but not unfaithful servant, you are now as graciously pleased to recall ; in laying them at your feet, my diplomatic existence is at

an end—but not so my loyalty. The proudest part of that existence was to think that I was deemed worthy of representing, however dimly, the effulgent sun of majesty! But, as I before said, that existence is now ended.” Here the Marquis made a dramatic pause, and was evidently setting in for a long speech, had he not been interrupted at this juncture by the Queen-mother, who, seizing on his last word, said, in a haughty voice, while a smile played round her mouth,—

“ Well, then, Monsieur le Marquis, it seemeth to us, that your speech could not do better than follow so laudable an example, and be ended too; for we have other matters of more import than to listen to a funeral oration over your defunct embassy, to whose existence you yourself put an end, by making your palace the resort of the heretical and disaffected, and receiving (though incognito) as our private advices informed us, our worst foes, the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé.—Denial is vain—for we know the facts, and excuses therefore are impossible,” added Catherine, waving her hand, seeing that the discomfited Marquis was about to speak. “ Therefore come we now to our second charge against you, Monsieur le Marquis; that of having lent your

fortified château of Quillac, near Drex, in Normandy, to the Signor Vittorio Cappello, for the nefarious purpose of confining and secreting therein the Signorina Arianna Bernardini, niece to the Gonfalonieri of Florence. What plea can you advance why our fullest vengeance should not go forth against you, Xavier de Quillac, Marquis de Millepropos, for such an outrage against the first functionary of our native city?"

"As I live!" quoth the Marquis, "and now stand in the light of your Majesty's countenance—more glorious than the meridian sun, overclouded though it be with just displeasure—"tis the first I've heard of it!"

"This to our face, Marquis!" cried the Queen; "by the rood! 'tis too much, when the damsel hath been your prisoner more than a year."

"I crave your liege's pardon." I meant not to deny that the 'demoiselle' hath been an inmate of the Château de Quillac for the time your Grace doth specify; but this I do protest, that I knew her not to be the niece of the Gonfalonieri of Florence, or I would have blown my castle to atoms ere I would have connived at any affront to one who holds so high a position in what must, in all times, be

considered the most illustrious city in the world, from having had the honour of being your Majesty's birth-place," bowed the Marquis.

Catherine's brow relaxed—she looked for a moment at her delicate and shell-like nails, and then replied.

"Your being ignorant of her relationship to the Gonfalonieri is some slight palliation of your conduct, as far as the offence to ourselves is concerned. But, think you, Marquis de Millepropos, that the abduction of young demoiselles is precisely the occupation suited to your station and years?"

This last word was too much for the poor Marquis, even from a Queen, and for a moment appeared to have the effect of the African weed, which poisons by paralysing; but he soon rallied, and arranging his ruff, he replied in a tone of sarcasm, "None should know better than your Majesty,"—but seeing the lowering expression on Catherine's face, he soon exchanged it for one of adulation—adding, par parenthèse—"from your knowledge of human nature—that neither high station nor increasing years can control the follies of the heart."

"Hey day! Monsieur le Marquis, worse and worse," cried the Queen, whose dignity, not

allowing her openly to notice the covert meaning of the Marquis's speech, determined to have her revenge, by publicly making him appear as ridiculous as possible—"Hey day! so it was on your *own* account that you purloined the demoiselle, after all?"

"Not so, may it please your Majesty," said the Marquis, looking bashfully down at the crimson rosettes of his shoes, as if it were sorely against his will that he was *compelled*, in self-defence, to betray the weakness of even a jeweller's daughter—"not so, please your Majesty. This demoiselle Bernardini, as she now turns out to be, passed for the daughter of a 'filadoro' at Venice, one Giovanni Ferrai. Now, having had the honour to be his Majesty's representative in that city, I felt it incumbent upon me to set an example of public morals; therefore, I do assure your highnesses, I never attempted any thing like an inferior conquest, although it *was* rumoured at Venice—"here the Marquis, though in the presence, raised himself on the points of his feet, and again adjusted his ruff;—"although it *was* rumoured at Venice that this demoiselle, whom your Majesties will bear in mind was only *then* supposed to be a jeweller's daughter, did affect me, and—and——"

"And for that reason," interrupted the Queen, with a broad smile,—while even royalty itself could scarcely subdue the universal laugh that arose at this part of the Marquis's narrative,—“and for that reason, I suppose,” said the Queen, “to rid yourself of this unhappy maiden’s importunities, you requested your friend, the Count Cappello, to carry her off out of your way; you providing a safe retreat to deposit her and her unrequited attachment in?”

“Not exactly,” said the Marquis, pulling his under lip with his left hand, while, with the right, he kept nervously drawing his sword half in and half out of the scabbard; “but—but”—

“But what, Marquis?” demanded the Queen.

“By the sword of my father, which was the gift of the great Bayard!” exclaimed the Marquis, with desperate courage, as if he thought with such a weapon by his side he ought so far to resemble its illustrious donor, as to be, at least, ‘sans peur,’ “the assistance I rendered Count Vittorio in this unlucky affair, arose solely out of a weak feeling, I allow: but a fear that he should think I bore malice.”

“Indeed! how so?” asked Catherine.

“Why, your Majesty must know,” said the

Marquis, casting his eyes down, and endeavouring to throw into his countenance a mosaic of blighted affection and noble forgiveness, as he first bent the white plume of his hat over the diamond loop and button; and then twisted the diamond loop and button over the plume; and so on alternately; “there once existed an attachment,—that is, an engagement,—between myself and Bianca Cappello, the only sister of the Count Vittorio;—poor thing! she loved me with that vehemence of affection which only Italian women are capable of: for the hearts of Italy are like their soil, full of volcanos—and volcanos must have their out-breakings;—so, one day, the beautiful Bianca exploded in a desperate fit of jealousy, though quite a causeless one,”—

“*That no one can doubt, Monsieur le Marquis,*” interrupted the Queen.

“And in a fit of pique,” continued the Marquis, bowing to Catherine for her speech, which he miraculously converted into a compliment; “she, like a true woman, punished herself, and married another!”

“Marvellous!” said the Queen, “for we had heard a very different version of the demoiselle’s ‘mésalliance;’ but still we do not see what this had to do with your aiding and

abetting the lady's brother, in carrying off the Signorina Bernardini."

"Merely that he might not think I resented his misguided sister's conduct," said the Marquis, with a conclusive and concluding shrug.

"But where was the Filadoro, the demoiselle's reputed father, all this time?" asked the Queen, "to allow you and Count Cappello to carry into effect your designs against his daughter?"

"So please your Majesty, 'tis a poor worthless knave,—one totally devoid of all feeling, conscience, and probity,—who once utterly spoilt the effect of a portrait of me, by allowing one of the brilliants in the setting to protrude too near the nose and mouth."

"An unconscionable varlet, truly!" rejoined the Queen, "to pretend that any thing brilliant could issue from such discreet lips. But, notwithstanding the lucid explanation, Marquis, you have given us of this business, we must inform you, that you will in four-and-twenty hours quit Paris, with such an escort as we may appoint, for your Norman castle of Quillac, and taking from the hands of your seneschal every key appertaining to the said castle, you will deliver them into those of Father Ignatius Dragoni, in the presence of a guard of two

hundred men-at-arms, who will accompany him from Paris to Dreux, and from Dreux to Florence,—we giving him full power to set the Signora Bernardini free, and to secure you, Xavier de Quillac, Marquis de Millepropos, in her place, for the term of one year, dating from the day of your arrival at the castle.”

From this fiat the poor Marquis knew there was no appeal, so he had nothing for it but to bow in silence, and think himself fortunate that it was in his own château, instead of in the Bastile, that his imprisonment was to be. The Maréchal de Retz now whispered something in the Queen’s ear, who added aloud, “And we further outlaw the Count Vittorio Cappello from France, and erase his name from the order of St. Catherine,* of which we had enrolled him a knight.

The fact was, that Vittorio Cappello had received the most solemn promises of zeal and friendship from the Maréchal de Retz; but he, in the mean time, having received letters from Martin Bernardini, soliciting his good offices in behalf of his niece, the prudent Maréchal thought it more politic to keep well with the

* The Order of St. Catherine was instituted in Palestine, 1063.

powers of his native city, and especially that of the Queen Mother, than to hold sacred any promises he might have made to a Venetian noble, who had only a fictitious position at the French court, which lasted no longer than his actual presence there; consequently, among the loudest inveighers against Vittorio Cappello's misconduct, was his *friend* (!), the Maréchal de Retz.

A few more presentations took place, after the Marquis de Millepropos' disgrace, and but few, for the clock of Notre Dame struck the quarter before noon, the hour of the royal dinner, and the Queen rose to leave the presence chamber; as she passed, Ignatius said, presenting Théodore de Bèze,

"This is the Sieur de Bèze, of whom I spoke to your Majesty."

Catherine bowed coldly, and turning to the Maréchal de Retz, said, with a meaning look, "Maréchal, you will see that the Sieur de Bèze be *properly* escorted from our palace."

"In all things your Majesty's pleasure shall be obeyed," bowed the Maréchal, leaving the presence-chamber by a different egress from the rest of the court.

Ignatius retraced his steps through the ante-room by which he had entered, and which the

musicians were preparing to leave ; taking Salinas's arm, he and the latter also quitted it, but had scarcely reached the first landing, before the yells and hootings of an immense mob reached their ears.

" What in the name of heaven is the matter now ? " said the blind musician. " I rejoice that I cannot see their barbarities, 'tis enough to hear the discordant preludes to them."

" You are right, Master Francis," said the Sieur Montagne, " and not grateful without due cause ; you only differ from posterity in this, that you hear these horrors, and therefore believe them,—while future ages will hear of them, and scarcely believe that any times could produce men so foolish and so wicked."

Here another shout drew Ignatius to the balcony of an open window, nor was he singular in the impulse which had caused him to look into the street at what was going on ; for he had no sooner reached the balcony, than he beheld every window in the palace filled with spectators, amongst whom were the whole court, excepting the Queen Mother and the Maréchal de Retz. The young King, with blanched cheeks and strained eye-balls, was looking on at the scene below, with a sort of sickening fear, which nevertheless had its origin neither

in remorse nor humanity ; for that *instinct* against cruelty, which nature roots more or less in all minds, scarcely amounts either to feeling or conscience in hearts where (as in the case of Charles the Ninth) education, habit, and example had done their uttermost to stifle both ; yet unknown to himself, that is, without his being able to trace to its source the moral reaction that was daily revolutionizing his whole system, the atmosphere of bloodshed, tyranny, and treachery he inhaled, were hourly poisoning his springs of life, and all historians have agreed that his mortal malady may be dated from the atrocities of the St. Bartholomew ; as, ill from that period, he closed his short and worse than inglorious career, in 1574, at the early age of four-and-twenty, amid the troubles which were the result of that most horrible massacre.

The scene now enacting beneath the windows of the Louvre, was a second and a more vehement assault on Théodore de Bèze ; the mob having received ‘mot de guet’ from the Maréchal de Retz, who had thus correctly interpreted Catherine de Medici’s order to have the Calvinist *properly* escorted from the palace. No sooner, therefore, had De Retz appeared, as if carelessly going about his own business, and

said in an audible voice, with a deprecating shrug of the shoulders as he passed De Bèze, “*Encore ce singe d'hérétique!*” than a hue and cry arose, and missiles flew in all directions at the devoted head of the Reformer, who bore this second persecution as patiently, and with as little resistance and retaliation as he had done the first. Accustomed as Ignatius was to the dark, tortuous, and sinister proceedings of the Spanish and Italian inquisitions; yet having by nature that broad and firm calibre of mind, which would have made him a better man had he been placed in better times, he revolted against the gratuitous treachery which had caused this second attack upon the mild and inoffensive being, whom an involuntary impulse had led him to protect; and in the newly aroused sympathy of his own individual feelings, he forgot that the policy of the day was to shrink from no means, however villainous, by which certain ends might be obtained. All vice at that period was, by the alchemy of the Spartan code, transmuted into virtue; where no alloy was recognizable or punishable, but detection and failure; otherwise one of the most infamous women who ever lived, Anne Bulleyn’s daughter, would never have come down to posterity, ‘plombé,’ with the bitter satires

of “Good (!) Queen Bess,” and “the Virgin Queen.”

Returning to the corridor, the Jesuit made a hasty apology to Francis Salinas, and begging of him to descend with him, and await his return in the inner court, he walked, or rather rushed into the street, and forcing his way through the mob, held the Queen’s ‘*passe-partout*,’ made out in the name of Théodore de Bèze, high above his head, calling loudly upon the people to desist, as in assailing the present object of their fury, they were guilty of ‘*lèse Majesté*,’ as he had a passport from the Queen Mother; just as he spoke, a large tile, or slate, was hurled by an invisible hand from the roof of the Louvre, with such unerring aim, that it fell upon Théodore de Bèze’s left arm, and broke it, at which spectacle the rabble ceased their assault, declaring that God had avenged his own cause, for that the missile which had fractured the Calvinist’s limb, had come direct from heaven!

“I hope you are not in much pain?” said the Jesuit.

“A mere scratch,” replied De Bèze; “what is this splinter of martyrdom to one who, in the right cause, would willingly secure similar honours for his whole person.”

"For the right, eternity must decide," said Ignatius, gloomily; "but as might ever has been, and it is to be feared, ever will be, right, in this world, I would counsel you not to brave it, but take this 'passe par-tout' of Catherine de Medici's, and to secure yourself against further evil."

"My way," said the Calvinist, pointing upwards, "lies yonder, where I doubt the Medicis have little influence; but for *your* good offices, and better will, I thank you; and now farewell; do by others as you have done by me. Prevent if you can your brethren from kindling the fire of their zeal with what they choose to denominate heretic fuel; and, despite controversy and party spirit, I will hope," added he, extending his hand, "that we may yet meet in another and a juster world."

"Amen," responded Ignatius, in an under voice, lest any of the bystanders should overhear his heterodoxy; "but ere we part in this, let me at least conduct you to a chirurgeon's, who may, in some sort, remedy the ill which hath befallen you."

"I thank you, Father, with all the gratitude your benevolence deserves; but 'twere a foul return for so much kindness, were I to allow

you to jeopard your own safety, by too great a care for mine,—and I need not tell you that your Church looks upon the members of our's as the pitch which none can touch without being defiled."

As Ignatius could not gainsay this assertion, he confined himself to pressing upon the Calvinist the Queen's passport.

"I will take it," replied Théodore, "not to treat ungraciously what it may have cost you some trouble to obtain; but for the efficacy of the Queen Mother's *promises* of protection we have just had an example."

"Nay," said Ignatius, "at the time of the 'émeute' you were not in possession (thanks to my neglect) of the Queen's 'passe partout;' or, doubtless, had you been able to produce it, no attack would have been made upon you."

"'Comme de raison,'" rejoined De Bèze, shaking his head; "'vous prêchez pour votre paroisse;' but had I had fifty, my mind mis-gives me that the result would have been the same."

As such was the Jesuit's conviction also, he merely repeated his 'adieu,' and, shaking the Calvinist hastily, but cordially, by the hand, he watched him for some few seconds, till he was

out of sight, and then retraced his steps to the inner court of the Louvre, where Francis Salinas was awaiting him, and, linking the blind man's arm within his own, they proceeded together to the ordinary of the 'Champ du drap d'or.'

CHAPTER III.

“ Dieu ! qu'il est amusant ! mais c'est un vrai trésor !
 Il a ressuscité les moeurs du siècle d'or ;
 Il dîne le matin, à l'antique il s'habille,
 Et j'ai cru voir marcher un portrait de famille.”

L'ECOLE DES VIEILLARDS,
Par Casimir Delavigne.

——— “ Little do we know of fate ;
 Perhaps our fortune is not in our power.
 We are the sport and plaything of high heaven,
 And while the second cause presumes to act,
 Think, and reflect, is acted by the first.
 As the great mover sets us, so we go.”

Charles Johnson's MEDÆA.

IN that quarter of the Faubourg St. Germain, where now lies the rue de Bac,—in whose ‘ spirituel ’ atmosphere Madame de Staël so sensibly delighted, notwithstanding all she wrote about the ‘ beau ciel d'Italie ; ’ not far from the hôtel where the great and good Chateaubriand still lives, and in which Miss Clarke holds her agreeable ‘ réunions ’ of

‘beaux esprits,’—where, from the amiable hostess downwards, one meets none but those who are

“Correct with spirit, eloquent with ease,
Intent to reason, or polite to please;”

but still nearer the present site of that cheapest of all cheap ‘Magasins,’ le petit St. Thomas,—bloomed, in the time of Charles the Ninth, of France, a large range of public gardens, which, from their extensive and umbrageous groves of lime and mulberry trees, were in those days called the ‘mille feuilles.’ In the midst of these gardens stood a large pavilion, of two stories high, the gable ends of which being cased in tin, and the thick cluster of chimneys being capped with the same metal, gave it, as they glittered in the morning sun, the appearance of a silver minaret: this custom of capping chimneys, and intersecting the roofs of houses, with tin—a custom which is still common in some parts of Piedmont and Savoy—was introduced into France in the thirteenth century. Before this pavilion was a ‘perron,’ with a double flight of steps,—one leading to the right, the other to the left; from the centre window, immediately above the ‘perron,’ obtruded a large gilt board, about two yards square, upon which were placed two small

mimic horses, in rich housings and caparisons, studded with coloured glass—which enacted the part of precious stones: on these steeds were seated two mail-clad figures, with lances in rest,—one representing the gay, gallant Francis the First; the other,—which was a much more unwieldy personage, and whose raised visor displayed a face, bearing a strong family likeness to a colossal love-apple, or tomata,—personating England's eighth Harry. Under this insignia appeared, in raised gilt letters, the following announcement:

“ Au Champ du Drap d'Or, Fabien Lardoire tient Auberge et Restaurant. Dîners en Seigneurs et en Bourgeois; bons Vins, en divers qualités, à la portée de tout le monde. Demain on donnera à dîner pour rien. Entrez toujours.”

Thus invited, most of ‘freluquets’ of Paris, (for ‘petit maître’ was an unborn title till two centuries afterwards), with the keen goadings of a noon-day appetite, ascended the steps of this then fashionable resort, and on reaching the balcony of the ‘perron,’ they entered by an open glass door, into a large oak-floored room, the numerous lattice-windows of which were pleasantly shaded by a luxuriant vine, and the clustering bunches of its purple fruit. Round

the walls, which were also in panels of dark polished oak, were to be seen suspended (while their owners dined) rapiers, gloves, and hats, of every fashion, from the broad-leaved scarlet glories of the cardinal's, down to the rich velvet plumed and jewelled ‘casquette’ of the gay noble, and the plain steeple-crowned beaver of the Huguenot. At the upper end of this immense room, on a dais, were placed about a dozen tolerably large, long oak tables, with an oak frame-work going round the bottom, which served as a foot-stool for the guests ; these tables, which were reserved for the ‘*dîners à seigneurs*,’ were distinguished by snow-white table cloths of ‘damasine,’ tied at each corner in a large knot, similar to that represented in Leonardo da Vinci’s fresco of the Last Supper. On every table, at right angles, was placed a very large oval brazen bason filled with snow, in which was embedded large globular glass caraffes of water, pewter flagons of table wine, and flasks of Burgundy, Sack, Xeres, Canary, Hippocras, and Malvoisie, for such as chose to call for them.—Half a dozen octagon pewter plates were piled before each guest ; and by the side of them one silver round apostle spoon, and one two-pronged steel, or rather iron, fork, with a horn handle—but knives were

not—for each person brought his own ; and the napkins were of a texture that would have made irreproachable curry-combs. At the opposite side of the plate to that on which the fork and spoon were placed, stood a tall-stemmed Venice wine-glass, and a small pewter drinking flagon—while between every four persons was a pewter donkey, with panniers of the same metal, one containing salt, the other pepper. In the lower part of the room were ‘tables bourgeois’ in every direction, laid much after the same fashion as those just described, but with rather coarser materials, which to modern notions may appear difficult. At the other end of the room, opposite the dais, behind a sort of ‘comptoir,’ stood, in suit of brightest blue and newest fustian, with well starched ruff, and snow-white night cap, mine host, Fabien Lardoire, and Gonarrelle, his wife, receiving the money and presiding over the respective destinations of the contents of two huge pewter tureens—so huge, that they looked more like baptismal fonts than ‘soupières.’ Dame Lardoire had, with true feminine ambition, over-stepped her sphere in the article of dress far more than her spouse, whose only decorations were the carving-knives and ‘couteaux de chasse’ which studded his gir-

dle ; while his ‘chère moitié’ had discarded the woollen petticoat worn by ladies of her class, for one of quilted Padusoy silk ‘rayée’ brown and rose ; her blue woollen stockings also displayed silver clocks ; her apron was of the newest ‘guimpeur ;’ but her ruff, it is true, was made of a material of the last year’s mode, called ‘rêve de jeune fille,’ and forgotten for some months by eyes polite, since ‘amour passager’ was preferred at court, as being more convenient *for all suits* ; but ‘en revanche,’ dame Gonarelle’s breast-knot was of bright rose-coloured ribbon, edged with silver, denominated ‘à la Diane, as the ‘fabrique’ had been invented for the Duchesse de Valentinois, on whom it had, for the first time, appeared the preceding week ; while, though last not least, Madame Lardoire’s cap border was of the very finest Flander’s lace—to say nothing of her high pointed hat being decorated on the left side with a bunch of carnations, fastened in with a gold slide, which by the ordinary course of things would never have got there ; but then, Gonarelle’s face was no ordinary one—and she knew it. How could she do otherwise,—since on the very first day that Fabien had opened the ‘Champ du drap d’or’ to the ‘publice,’ some score of ‘grands seig-

neurs,' to make it the fashion, had come to dine there ; and the Cardinal de Lorraine, in telling her to remove a plate of 'guignes,'* had said they wanted none, but those in her eyes.

It was not the custom in France, in the sixteenth century, for women to dine at the few places of public entertainment then existing ; but as it was never the fashion in that country to mew them up as domestic drudges, and dedicate all the good things of this world solely to the lords of the creation, as in England, they were generally to be seen, towards three o'clock in the afternoon, gliding, with their all-conquering toilettes, sipping their lemonade, and listening to the music, through the shady retreats of the 'Mille feuilles,' or other places of amusement in or about Paris. Within the ordinary (for *café* it could not be called, since coffee, which only crept into Venice in 1543, did not reach France till 1644, when it was brought by a Turkish merchant to Marseilles),† within the ordinary, then, beyond the four

* 'Guignes' are a species of black cherries.

† Coffee was first introduced into England by a Mr. Nathaniel Canopius, a Cretan, who made it his daily beverage at Baliol College, Oxford, in 1641. The first coffee-house in England was kept by Jacob, a Jew, at the sign of the Angel, in Oxford, in 1650. Mr. Edwards, an English Turkey merchant, brought home with him a Greek servant, who kept the

‘marmitons’ who carried the viands to and fro, not a ‘garçon’ was to be seen, as all the attendants were smartly dressed grisettes, whose costume only varied from that of their mistress, in the less costly materials of which it was composed.

The ‘potage’ which Fabien now meted out was very different from either the ‘Julien’ or ‘Jardinière’ of the present day, being a hotch-potch of bread, butter, game, and all conceivable vegetables; but, nevertheless, emitting an odour which would have obviated the necessity of *compelling* even Dominie Samson to eat; while that distributed by his wife was a ‘purée de lentils à la crême’—called, at the time, ‘délices des Capelans’;*—after which followed, ‘Bœuf à la Cardinal,’ which were ‘filets’ of beef with olives; then came ‘Gigots à l’Henri Huit,’ or roast legs of mutton, embedded in white ‘haricot’ beans, done in a sort of red sauce, with garlie; these were succeeded by Bayonne hams, baked in champagne, with a ‘purée’ of chestnuts, whose satellites were small ‘plats’ of ‘salmis,’ or, as they were then

first house for making and selling coffee in London 1652; and the Rainbow coffee-house, near Temple-bar, was, in 1657, petitioned against as a nuisance to the neighbourhood.

* ‘Capelan’ means a poor ignorant priest.

called, ‘plantureux,’ of poultry and game of every description ; which, in their turn, were replaced by vegetables and roasted tongues à l’Espagnol, studded with cloves and ‘cornichons.’ The last ‘hor-d’œuvre’ was a course of fish, which seemed to contain a sample of every fish in the sea, from ‘Esturgeon héliété,’ which was sturgeon, dressed in what our modern ‘cuisine’ terms a ‘Mayonnèse,’ down to that worst of all bad things (gastronomically speaking), ‘thon marinée.’ Then came the roasts, with their fragrant salads,—in the making of which “onion atoms” had “mingled in the bowl,”—thus anticipating the incomparable receipt of Sydney Smith, who is always equally admirable and equally witty, whether in his directions for the concoction of a salad, or in his remonstrances against a three-and-a-half per cent. feeding tax on the horses’ oats. After the roasts came the grand ‘finale’ of ‘plats doux,’ consisting of what, in England, at that time, were called ‘Puptons’ of fruit, and in France, ‘Poëllons à la jardinière,’—being nothing more than what are now called ‘Macédoines’ of cherries, strawberries, grapes, &c. &c. ; while creams, ‘pâtisserie,’ ‘nougat,’ and ‘massepains,’ or sweet cakes, without end, concluded the repast.

Just as Ignatius and Salinas ascended the steps of the ‘perron’ of the ‘Champ du drap d’or,’ the Marquis de Millepropos brushed past them. It may appear strange, knowing how quickly the news of his disgrace at court would make the tour of the town, and the snow-ball additions it was likely to gather in its progress, that the ex-ambassador should have selected so public a place as the ordinary of the ‘Mille feuilles’ to parade his fallen fortunes in, on the last day that remained to him of liberty: but he took a different view of the case, and was determined, by his presence, to arrest for at least a few hours, the virulence of the remarks likely to be made on his recall from Venice, and, at the same time, to give his own colouring to the affair, by announcing himself as the ‘victime d’une sexe perfide.’ But, alas! misfortune brings us at once to the sunset of life, and lengthens our shadows before us! so that the news of the poor marquis’s disgrace had preceded him at least by ten minutes: the first consequence of which was, that as, according to a daily practice of his, he proceeded, ‘en passant,’ to chuck Madame Fabien’s pretty little dimpled chin, whispering, by way of accompaniment, “Gonarelle, tu êtes une ange!” the dame

saucily replied, aloud, while she turned her diamond glances on the young Duc de la Trémouille, and nearly jerked a ladlefull of scalding soup over the Marquis's daintily embroidered glove, “‘Et vous, Monsieur le Marquis, vous êtes quelque chose de plus,—car vous êtes un mésange.’’*

“‘Insolente !’” muttered the indignant Marquis, as he strode forward, and hung his black velvet steeple-crowned hat, with its glittering band of costly jewels, against the wall,—where, at that moment, could he have had his way, he would much rather have hung Gonarelle’s head, as an effectual method of suspending her impertinent answers. Next disengaging himself of his rapier, he took his seat at one of the tables, on the dais, in which he was left in unmolested possession,—as a disgraced courtier is seldom importuned with the civilities of his acquaintance.

Salinas and Ignatius were scarcely seated, before the latter perceived, at another table, behind him, on his right hand, a Spanish hidalgo, by name Don Silvas y Mendez, who was, while waiting for his soup, surveying the apartment and the guests, as they continued to

* A tomtit.

pour in, the latter being evidently all strangers to him.

"Ha, Don Silvas, well met!" said the Jesuit, tilting back his 'tabouret,' and placing his hand upon the Spaniard's shoulder.

"Padre, your most obedient,—I am enchanted to see you! May you live a thousand years! I left Don Manuel thriving to the uttermost of his wishes; and the splendour of his new 'coche' dividing the attention of all Madrid with the miraculous escape of the Prince of Calatrava," said Don Silvas.

"Ah, by the way, what is the real truth of that affair? and what has the promotion of that poor Padre Ruy Lopez to the rich bishopric of Segovia to do with it? Some say that Philip gave him the bishopric from his being the best chess-player in Spain; while others write me a garbled account of Lopez owing it to the Prince of Calatrava. Which way lies the truth?

"'Chi lo sa, non scrive; chi lo scrive non sa,'"^{**} said a low clear voice, before Don Silvas y Mendez had time to reply. Startled at the sound, both he and the Jesuit looked up, and

* Those who know it don't write, and those who write know nothing of the matter.

the latter perceived, seated at the table with the Spaniard, but at the opposite side, the same tall, dignified-looking personage who had passed through the ante-room, from the Queen's closet, that morning, at the Louvre, and bowed so graciously to the crowd awaiting the opening of the doors of the presence chamber.

"As I before remarked, gentlemen," said the stranger, drawing his stool round to the table where the Jesuit and Salinas were sitting, and motioning to Don Silvas to join the coterie, as he continued, with as much ease as if he had known the trio all his life, and in the same low, clear tone of voice, while Ignatius and Don Silvas, but especially the latter, listened to him with distended eyes and suspended breath. "As I before remarked, gentlemen, those who know the real history of Ruy Lopez' elevation to the bishopric of Segovia don't write about it, and those who write about it know nothing of the matter. So that, in all probability, it will go down, with many other fictions, as an historical fact to posterity, that Ruy Lopez, the poor priest, owed his sudden and extraordinary elevation to his skill as a chess-player; and as well that as any other fable, since, as Miguel Cervantes truly observes, 'Life itself is a game of chess.' But the real facts are these, for there

is always, upon an average, about one grain of truth to every bushel of falsehood. You are aware that Don Ramiez de Biscaye, who was the Prince de Calatrava's rival suitor for the hand of the fairest lady in all Castile, Donna Estella d'Ossuna, laid before Philip of Spain, some short time ago, the particulars of a plot which he had discovered, by means of an intercepted correspondence of the Prince of Calatrava with the court of France, wherein the Prince figured as chief conspirator against the life of Philip the Second, instigator of a revolution, and aspirant to the throne of Spain. In proportion to the great love the King had borne to Calatrava, so was now the extent of his anger and vengeance against him ; and ordering him immediately under arrest, with a warrant for his execution before sunset, he overwhelmed Don Ramiez with expressions of gratitude, the promise of Donna Estella's hand, and a command to get letters patent made out against that evening for the royal signature, creating him Duke and Governor of Valencia, in recompense of the service he had done the state by the detection of the Prince of Calatrava's treasonable plot. That very evening Philip, to show how little the fate of his late favourite weighed with him, convoked more

than his usual court, in the only portion of his new palace of the Escurial that is yet finished, and among others, Domine Ruy Lopez had the honour of a summons to contend with his Majesty at his favourite game. The nobles, according to the etiquette of the court of Spain, were ranged round the combatants, standing the whole time, and looking as immovable as the pawns and knights on the royal chess-board,—all except the young Count d'Ossuna, who seemed equally overpowered with mental anguish, at the fate of his illustrious cousin Calatrava, and bodily fatigue at standing so long. In the midst of the game, just as the King was on the point of being check-mated,—that is according to the disposition of the chessmen,—and Ruy Lopez was plunged into the very lowest depths of reflection and dilemma, as to how he should avail so disrespectful and impolitic a move as that of check-mating a monarch, the ‘haute-lisse,’ or tapestry, became suddenly agitated, and from the secret panneling behind, Fernando Calavar, the state executioner, appeared. You well know Calavar's person,—the heavy brows, bull-neck, and short bushy beard, which gives him the appearance of half brute, half man, as though nature had formed him in a patent mould expressly for the office which he fills.

Philip's brows knit, a doubly imperious expression stole freezingly over his dark features, his right foot stamped the ground, and his right hand involuntarily grasped the hilt of his sword, as he turned to Calavar and seemed to ask if Calatrava was dead."—

"Why he *did* ask it, and in a voice of thunder," interrupted Don Silvas y Mendez, who had hitherto listened to the stranger's narration with a sort of bewildered and breathless attention, not touching any of the different viands placed before him; while the Jesuit and this mysterious 'umbra' who had thought fit to join their circle, quietly discussed their dinners, as the one talked and the other listened. The stranger waved his hand, as if deprecating further observations on the part of Don Silvas, and then in the same low, clear, unbroken tone, continued from the last words he had spoken, as though no interruption had ever taken place.

"But the Prince of Calatrava was not dead, for the executioner came to announce, that the prisoner demanded, in right of his being a Grandee of Spain, the privilege of dying by the axe and the block, and of passing with an ecclesiastic the three last hours of his life. Be this as it might"—

"Señor, you forget," again interrupted Don

Silvas, “that the King then inquired if the royal confessor, the Bishop of Segovia, had not been with the prisoner?” Here Don Silvas paused, with a sort of fear that he had said too much, and had offended the stranger by this second interruption; but the latter, instead of resuming the thread of his discourse, said, as he helped himself to salad and called for a flask of Burgundy,—“Go on, Señor, and when you come to the dungeon scene, which I think I know more about than you, I will save you the trouble of continuing.”

Apparently much relieved by the sound of his own voice, for he had more than half fancied himself in a strange supernatural dream all this while, Don Silvas proceeded:—

“‘Sire,’ replied Calavar, ‘a holy father is with him, but the Prince obstinately refuses to receive absolution from any prelate but the Bishop of Segovia; alleging that such is the right of every noble condemned for high treason.’

“‘Such *are* our rights,’ said the indignant d’Ossuna, boldly; ‘and we exact from your Majesty the privileges of our cousin.’

“These daring words of the young Count seemed like a firebrand thrown into the midst of the hitherto hermetically sealed combustibles

of the courtiers' discontent ; for at this signal Don Diego de Terraxas, the venerable Count de Valencia, drawing up his gigantic figure to its full height, and holding within the mailed glove of his left hand, his baton of grand constable of Spain, as with his right he grasped his long and ponderous Toledo, exclaimed in a voice that seemed to have gone back some fifty years, and borrowed the strength and clearness of life's early spring—

“ ‘ Our rights and the King’s justice are inseparable : who denies the one, or withholds the other, jeopardizes the throne of Spain !’

“ ‘ Our rights and privileges !’ cried all the nobles at once. These words, which seemed to be repeated by a thousand echoes through the palace, made Philip bound, as with an electric shock, from his seat.

“ ‘ By the bones of Campeador ! by the souls of my fathers,’ thundered he, as his glittering Toledo leaped from its scabbard, ‘ I have sworn neither to eat, nor sleep, till the gory head of the traitor Gusman Calatrava is brought to me. So be it as I said ; but Don Tarrazas is right, the justice of a King confirms the rights of his subjects. Señor Constable, where lives the nearest Bishop ?’

“ ‘ Sire,’ replied Tarrazas, “ I am more con-

versant with the affairs of the camp than those of the church ; your Almoner here, Don Silvas, will be able to inform you on this subject better than I can.'

" 'So please your Majesty,' said I, with fear and trembling, ' the Bishop of Segovia is attached to the Royal household, but the prelate who filled that benefice is dead within the last week, and the 'fecit' for nominating his successor is still on the council table, and has to be submitted to the Pope for his veto ; but there is going to be at Valladolid a meeting of the heads of the Church next week ; all the bishops will be there, and the Bishop of Madrid left his palace yesterday to attend it.'

" As I ceased speaking, a joyous smile lit up the features of d'Ossuna, which was natural, as the condemned Prince was not only this young man's kinsman, but his dearest friend. The King perceived this unguarded smile, and his eye immediately kindled with a new expression of mingled impatience, and the triumph of covert authority.

" 'We are King here,' said he, with a preternatural degree of external calm, which scarcely concealed the storm that raged within ; ' our Royal person must not be the target either for trifling or disobedience ; this sceptre,

Señors,' continued he, lifting the small filagreed state sceptre from an adjoining table, and holding it out at arm's length, ' this sceptre appears to you slight, but he who has the temerity, either to doubt its power, or to brave it, slight as it seems, shall find that it can crush and blast him as effectually as the most ponderous thunderbolt ever hurled from Heaven ! For the rest, our Holy Father the Pope is a little in arrears with us, and we do not fear his disapprobation in the step we are about to take ; and since the King of Spain can at his pleasure create a prince, we see no earthly reason why he should not by the same volition create a bishop ; rise, then, Don Ruy Lopez, Bishop of Segovia. We, Philip the Second, King of Spain, by the grace of God, do ordain you as such, and command you forthwith to take your rank in the Church.'

" As you may suppose, every one was panic-struck. Ruy Lopez regained his feet mechanically : he tried to speak ; but, with his poor parish curacy, his tongue seemed also fled ; at length he stammered out—

" ' May it please your Majesty——'

" ' Silence ! my lord bishop,' cried the King, ' and obey the orders of your Sovereign ; the ceremonies of your inauguration shall be gone

through on a future day, and our subjects will not fail to recognize our pleasure in this affair. Bishop of Segovia, it is our will that you now repair to the dungeon of the condemned traitor Gusman de Calatrava, shrive his soul of its foul sins, and, in three hours from this, deliver his body into the hands of Fernando Calavar, who will introduce his neck to the axe, whose acquaintance he has stood upon the ceremony of making, though a hempen ruff might have served his purpose. And *you*, Calavar, we will await you in this chamber :—you will bring us the traitor's head ; and beware of all unnecessary delay, for we sup not till Don Gusman, Prince de Calatrava, and Duke of Medina Sidonia, is no more : that our word may be fulfilled, for as our worthy Constable Don Diego de Tarrazas truly observes, the *rights* of the subject are inseparable from the justice of the sovereign. Ha, ha, ha !' concluded Philip, with his low, inward bitter laugh, as reseating himself at the chess-board, he said to Don Ramiez de Biscaye, ' Come, Señor, we depute you to finish the Bishop's game ; and our loyal nobles here may look on, lest they find the time tedious till the arrival of their friend, the *head* of the Calatrava family.'

Philip then motioned to Ruy Lopez to ap-

proach, and said, ‘Here, my lord bishop,’ (for he seemed never to tire of repeating Lopez’s new title), ‘take this our signet ring, in order that the prisoner may have no excuse for doubting your authority ;’ and then turning to the assembled courtiers, he added, ‘Well, senors, dare you still doubt the justice of your King ?’

“All maintained a profound silence—and even Don Ramiez seemed uneasy upon the velvet cushion upon which he was kneeling, according to etiquette, as his Majesty’s partner at chess.”—

Here the stranger placed the Burgundy before Don Silvas, and with the most perfect ‘*sang froid*,’ and in the same evenly modulated voice, resumed the narration with as much ease as if he had never been interrupted.

“No sooner had Ruy Lopez quitted the presence, senors,” continued he, “then he walked behind Calavar with such bewildered and downcast looks, that any one would have supposed that, instead of being thus suddenly translated to a bishopric, he was a victim just made over to the executioner ; the fact is, the worthy man was under the influence of one of those freaks of imagination which sometimes make persons believe in the intervention of fairies, and other supernatural agencies. In his heart

(far from the precincts of the Escorial I say it), he almost cursed the King and the court : true, he was a bishop of Segovia ; but at how terrible a price had the honour been purchased ! Why should he be made the means of conducting to the block a man who had never offended him ? nay, whom he loved so much,—Don Gusman, who gave the best dinners in Madrid; the Prince of Calatrava, who (next to himself) was the best chess-player in Spain ; and if ‘nolo episcopari’ could have unfrocked him, he would at that moment have repeated it with all sincerity. But, alas ! Bishop of Segovia he was—not so much by the grace of God, as by the disgrace of Don Gusman—and bishop of Segovia he must remain, even though it should entail upon him the shriving of fifty Princes of Calatrava for execution. Nothing therefore remained for him but to pray that the marble colonnades, through which he passed on his way to the dungeons, might close upon him, or the tessellated pavement might open and swallow him up ; for either of these catastrophes he prayed impartially and sincerely—but he prayed in vain ! These pious aspirations in their perturbed throes had so muddled his chronological ideas, that he found himself in the Prince of Calatrava’s dungeon before he

thought he had got beyond the outside of the presence-chamber. The first act of devotion the new-made prelate performed was, to throw himself into the arms of Don Gusman, and to sob like a child, till the smiles of the prisoner dried his tears. They then knelt down together, and passed an hour in prayer; after which, they arose and conversed: what counsels and consolations the worthy bishop made use of in his exhortations I know not; but at the expiration of half an hour he drew from his vest a chess-board and a bag of chess-men; and he and the Prince commenced a vigorous combat. Thus employed, the three probationary hours expired before either was aware of their approach; the first intimation they had of it, being the shooting of the heavy and rusty bolts of the dungeon door, and the re-appearance of Calavar, accompanied by two halberdiers, all three armed with battle-axes,—those of the two soldiers covered with black crape, but that of the executioner gleaming out in fearful brightness, as the light of the torches held by him and his companions fell upon it. Calavar demanded his prey, who, it was evident, petitioned for a further reprieve to finish his game; but the official no doubt pleaded the King's commands, as being immutable; whereat

Ruy Lopez, clearing the rude block table at which they were playing, with one bound seized the glittering battle-axe of the executioner, before the latter was aware of his intention, and, re-seating himself, resumed the game with perfect composure ; while, by brandishing the deadly weapon in his right hand, he kept the soldiers and Calavar at bay—the executioner all the time trembling in his shoes to think how he should answer this delay to the King, or rather, making sure that his head would have to answer for it. At the expiration of a quarter of an hour, the Prince de Calatrava had check-mated the Bishop. Both arose—the latter returning the battle-axe to Calavar,—the former, with great dignity, waving his hand to him in intimation that he was then ready to follow him. Don Gusman walked with a firm step and an erect bearing,—not so Ruy Lopez, whose every limb shook like one in the palsy, and whose bewilderment of mind was such, that he even forgot to take away his chess-board, though for years he had never moved without that appendage. The dungeon doors closed with a lugubrious and hollow sound, which echoed and re-echoed—I conclude—through the damp vaulted subterranean corridors—for the Bishop of Segovia started at

every echo—while ever and anon, as if to bid him be of good cheer, Calatrava affectionately pressed his hand. In this order they at length reached an open court, where the block, with its pall-like hangings, was already dressed ; with a common black wooden coffin at its base, devoid of velvet, and the escutcheon of the Calatravas, done in iron work, but *effaced*, as is the custom in Spain, for all those who perish by the hand of the headsman for high treason. Innumerable torches blazed through the open space, and seemed to add new terrors to the deadly preparations, as their red glare fell upon the heavy armour of the band of motionless soldiers that stood with their arquebuses reversed round the block, at the foot of which Don Gusman again embraced Ruy Lopez, presenting him with a brilliant ring of priceless value ; this done, he ungirded his sword, and gave it to Calavar, and, next, unfastening his ruff and baring his throat, he flung a well-filled purse among the soldiers, who had all the inclination in the world to have rent the air with ‘vivas !’ had not compassion made them feel how bitter a mockery it would have been. These last arrangements finished, the Prince de Calatrava ascended the steps of the scaffold, and walked towards death with the

same noble and undaunted bearing with which he had walked through life : as he knelt down, to forward his last prayer to that God before whom he was so shortly to appear, the solemn stillness of the scene was only broken by the ill-suppressed sobs of the spectators ;—another moment, however, and a tumult arose,—the executioner paused,—the bishop ceased crossing himself,—the soldiers fell back, and the victim alone continued praying,—as through the crowd rushed the Grand Constable of Spain, Don Diego de Tarrazas, holding high above his head, at the end of his ‘ baton,’ the King’s warrant to suspend the execution of the Prince of Calatrava, who was instantly remanded back to the presence. ‘ Am I in time ?’ the old man *seemed to say*,—and then his athletic figure sank down, with the feebleness of an infant, on the coffin that had been prepared for Don Gusman, and life appeared extinguished, had not the night-wind, that blew about his silver hair, fanned him into returning consciousness, and the power of assisting his friend Calatrava to descend from the scaffold.”

“ And now, señor,” added the stranger, turning to Don Silvas, “ have the goodness, while I finish my wine, to relate to this worthy padre and his friend what befell the Prince of

Calatrava and Ruy Lopez, after they returned with the Grand Constable to the King."

Don Silvas y Mendas stared at this strange being, who, with the blandest and most courtly manner, nevertheless issued such fatical mandates to people whom he had never seen before,—either to talk or be silent, as his own humour dictated; but Don Silvas was himself too well-bred to give vent to his surprise in words, especially as he was determined, as soon as the history of Ruy Lopez's sudden elevation was ended, to try and elucidate, if possible, sundry peculiarities and discrepancies that had occurred in the stranger's mode of relating the story, which had greatly excited his curiosity,—the more so as he never remembered to have seen him at the court of Spain, or elsewhere in Andalusia; and the Spanish he spoke was by no means the pure language of Madrid, but tainted with a foreign accent, and Italianized idiom;—therefore, slightly bowing his acquiescence, Don Silvas continued:

"From the time that Ruy Lopez had quitted the room with Calavar, we all stood, half-dead with fatigue and chagrin, looking on at the interminable royal game; at length, at the expiration of the three hours, Don Remiez de Biscaye suffered himself to be check-mated. Charmed

(as he always is) at the result, Philippushed aside the chess-board, and leaning back in his chair, said, ‘It is not fair that so loyal a subject as Don Ramiez de Biscaye should ever play a losing game—except at chess—so we would e'en sign, while waiting for supper, and the arrival of our two additional guests, the new Bishop of Segovia and the *late* Prince of Calatrava, the letters patent we ordered to be made out this morning, creating him our trusty and well-beloved cousin the Duke and Governor of Valencia. Señor count, are they ready for our signature?’ Don Ramiez trembled and turned pale, as if this weight of royal favour oppressed him,—but the King grew impatient, and extended his hand for the letters patent. Thus pressed, Don Ramiez knelt down, and, in a sort of agitated precipitation, withdrew a scroll of parchment from his bosom, and placed it in the King’s hands, who said, as he received them, ‘to sign these patents will be the pleasantest act we have performed to-day:—the headsman has by this time done his part, of punishing the traitor, it is therefore high time that the monarch should perform his, that of

rewarding fidelity.' Philip then unrolled the parchment, and ran his eyes over it:—suddenly fire seemed to flash from them; his cheek blanched; his lip quivered, as he exclaimed, falling back in his chair, '*Mother of God! What do I behold?*' then, suddenly rallying, and seizing the pen, with which he was to have signed the letters patent for Don Ramiez's dukedom, he wrote a hasty reprieve for the Prince de Calatrava, with an order for him instantly to repair to the presence, accompanied, however, by Calavar, who was instructed to leave the soldiers and scaffold as they were,—ready for an execution. With this warrant Don Diego de Tarraxas was instantly despatched, without being apprised of any of the particulars that had given rise to it; nor were we, till after his departure,—when imagine our astonishment, to say nothing of our delight, at finding that Don Ramiez, in his hurry, instead of giving Philip the letters patent as he thought, had given him a well-concocted plot of his own, for assassinating the King, with a detailed account (as it was intended for Cardinal Ximines, at Rome), of how he intended to accuse the Prince

de Calatrava of a conspiracy against Philip, through the pretended medium of an intercepted correspondence : whereby he should achieve the three great objects of his ambition,—namely, to rid himself of a hated rival with Donna Estella, and to advance himself in the monarch's good graces, so as to be placed nearer his person, in order that he might with the greater facility carry his regicide designs into execution. Philip crumpled the parchment convulsively in his hand, which trembled strongly from violent excitement, and, as soon as he could speak, he turned to Don Ramiez with a forced and appalling calm, and said,

“ ‘ Don Ramiez de Biscaye, said we not that you should be rewarded ? and by our kingdom so you shall, anon. We were for giving you a paltry dukedom, and the government of Valencia—mere bagatelles, which the mutability of human affairs, a conspiracy, for instance, or our death, might any day have deprived you of. ’Tis true at the time we were about to confer on you these grants, we were ignorant of the *nature* and *extent* of the obligations we were

under to you ; but now that knowledge hath superseded ignorance, we will take special heed that our recompense be commensurate to the services you designed us ; we, therefore, command, that instead of assuming the government of Valencia, which you could not have done under a week's delay, you *forthwith* take the place of the Prince of Calatrava, on the scaffold which is now ready dressed below ; thus saving you all the heart-sickenings of hope deferred.'

" Don Ramiez looked so much more like a livid corpse than a living man, that it required a very slight stretch of imagination to believe that Philip's words alone had fulfilled their purport. At this juncture the doors were thrown open, and Don Gusman, Ruy Lopez, the Grand Constable, and Calavar appeared. Before they had quite reached the upper end of the room where Philip and the court were standing, the King cried with a loud voice, as he pointed to Don Ramiez—

" ' Fernando Calavar, *you* are in the habit of rewarding traitors ; Don Ramiez de Biscaye

awaits your good offices, and we await his head ! See that it be with us at supper, in one quarter of an hour from this time.'

" Don Ramiez, who had his arms folded and his eyes bent on the ground, suffered Calavar, without any resistance (which he knew would be useless), to place his heavy hand upon his shoulder, and so conduct him from the presence ; the King the whole time (while we all preserved a profound silence) pointing after him, with his high raised right hand, which held the parchment detail of the conspiracy, till the doors closed on the conspirator, when lowering his arm, and grasping the hilt of his sword, he slowly walked round the circle of courtiers as they stood, and looking in all our faces separately, and intently, for about a second, he exclaimed, in that iron tone so peculiar to him, which seems to bend, if not to break, the spirits of all who hear it—

" ' Well, señors, if any *now* doubt the justice of their King, let them speak.'

" ' None ! Viva el Re !' resounded through the chamber. As soon as the tumult had subsided, Ruy Lopez, who understood nothing of

all he saw and heard, tremblingly threw himself at Philip's feet, and said—

“ ‘ Sire, I am alone guilty of having disobeyed your Majesty’s commands ; I it was who seduced the Prince of Calatrava into beguiling the few hours remaining to him of life with a farewell game of chess ; I it was who seized Calavar’s axe and threatened to make him feel it if he did not give us an additional quarter of an hour to finish our game ; mine, in both instances, was the offence, mine alone be the punishment.’

“ ‘ Agreed !’ said the King, with a smile, which for once was unequivocal ; ‘ but first rise, my Lord Bishop, and learn from me that which experience has made me capable of teaching. Touching spiritual matters, I will always defer to your better judgment ; but, with regard to temporal ones, know, O Bishop of Segovia, that actions in themselves are nothing, it is the *result* that stamps them either with right or wrong.* Your disobedience, in this instance,

* I beg leave to say, that this axiom was Philip the Second of Spain’s,—not mine ; but judging from daily and hourly events, most of the world seem to be perfectly of his Majesty’s way of thinking.

has spared us an endless remorse ; but as all acts of ‘*lese Majesté*’ should be commemorated, this one shall be enrolled among our archives, by our giving you a golden chess-board, the bishops of which shall be likenesses of yourself, and the knights a resemblance of the Prince of Calatrava, who, as he was a participator in your disobedience, should also be embraced in our mode of signalizing it,’ added Philip, opening his arms to receive Don Gusman ; ‘ but,’ continued he, now linking his arm within that of the Prince, ‘ though our loyal and trusty friend here has escaped the scaffold, we by no means intend restoring him to liberty ; on the contrary, it is our pleasure, that to-morrow he espouse, in the presence of our whole court, the Donna Estella d’Ossuna ; and now, Señors, to supper—my Lord Bishop, your arm !’ And the King thus leaning on the Prince of Calatrava and Ruy Lopez, we followed into supper.”

“ Such, señors, is the real history of the elevation of Ruy Lopez,” said the stranger, as soon as Don Silvas y Mendez had ceased speaking.

“ May I take the liberty of asking, Señor,” said the latter, “ how it happens that you, (though I do not remember to have had the pleasure of meeting you before, at least certainly not at the Escorial the night Ruy Lopez was made Bishop of Segovia), who seem to be so accurately acquainted with all the details of the Prince of Calatrava’s narrow escape, yet in parts of your narration made use of the expressions *he seemed to be asking*; for instance, in the dungeon, you said—‘ Calavar demanded his prey, who, it *was evident*, petitioned for a further reprieve.’ Now, from this, one might be lead to suppose an impossibility—namely, that though you had been an eye-witness to the whole scene, you had heard nothing ?”

“ Nevertheless, that is precisely the fact, señor,” replied the stranger, coldly, as he measured Don Silvas with his eye from head to foot.

The latter, who was by no means slightly imbued with the superstition of the times, and was, moreover, a Castilian, involuntarily backed his seat a few paces, and the next minute suddenly discovering that he had been an immense

time at table, shook Ignatius by the hand, bowed to the stranger, and made a precipitate retreat into the gardens, where the music had been for a long time playing, and crowds were now assembled. Effectively, on looking round, the Jesuit perceived that he, Salinas, and the stranger, had the room to themselves,—so long had they sat, and so interested had they been, in listening to and reciting the history of Ruy Lopez's bishopric and the Prince of Calatrava's escape. But Ignatius now rose, and proposed adjourning to the gardens—continuing, however, to walk by the side of the stranger, whose face he was convinced he had seen before meeting him that day at the Louvre, and whose whole manner, coupled with his last strange reply to Don Silvas's question, so raised his curiosity and excited his interest, that he determined to find out who he was, before they parted. On reaching the gardens, therefore, he seated Salinas in an arbour, who preferred listening to a natural concert of nightingales, to mingling with the crowd, whose merry faces he could not see. Promising to return to him, Ignatius walked on with the stranger through

a grove of fragrant lime-trees, whose sombre shade had been deserted by the more youthful frequenters of the ‘*Mille feuilles*’ for its sunny ‘*tapis verts*’—where, to judge by their ever-springing freshness, the fairies appeared to trip it all night, and repair, by their flower-creating steps, the crushing they had received from more substantial feet by day.

“I think, señor, I saw you at the Louvre to-day?” said the Jesuit.

“Nothing more likely, for I was there,” was the laconic reply.

“Do you make any stay in Paris?”

“No—I leave it to-morrow night—and you, padre—?”

“And I also leave it to-morrow; perhaps we may travel the same road. Are you for Italy?”

Without heeding this latter question, the stranger replied, more as if he were thinking aloud—“No, you won’t leave it to-morrow; not till the day after; for Catherine de Medici’s letters for Florence will not be ready till then.”

Ignatius stared; but he merely replied, “Pardon me, signor, I have the Queen’s commands to depart at break of day to-morrow.”

"Aye," rejoined the stranger, who continued to walk with his hands behind his back, and to talk in the same careless, mild, yet decided, tone that he had done all along,—“Aye, to escort the Marquis de Millepropos to his Norman castle; but, on reaching your hostelry you will find another order to await the Queen’s dispatches till the day after to-morrow.”

The Jesuit now stared in good earnest. Who could this extraordinary being be, who seemed to know every one, and every thing? Yet there was nothing unusual in his appearance, beyond the remarkable paleness and beauty of his features, and the extreme richness, yet plainness, of his black velvet dress; the vivid purple of the taffeta that lined his cloak, the large brilliant in each rosette of his shoes, and the peculiarly fine water of the diamonds that clasped in the black plumes of his hat.

Just as Ignatius was on the point of boldly asking him his name, by came the Marquis de Millepropos, with drawn rapier, thrusting at the unresisting trees, and singing,

“ *Tirilerila ! tirilerila !*
“ *Hélas ! parmi tant de si beaux yeux,*
Pour me mettre bien sur à l'abri,
Il faut à quelques-uns faire mes adieux,
Car me partager je ne puis !”

“ ‘ Trève, Monsieur le Marquis ! ’ ” cried the stranger, backing so as to avoid coming in contact with that illustrious personage’s hostile weapon.

“ Ah, illustrissimo Signor Margini ! how fares it with you ? As for me, I am already so ‘ blasé ’ with Paris and the endless jealousies, rivalries, plots, and counterplots of the women, that I am off for Normandy to-morrow. Do you often come here ? Of course you have heard of this little fracas of mine at court ? Oh, those women ! those women ! I went to De Retz afterwards, to ask him if some malicious person—the Prince de Condé, perhaps,—had not been rousing Catherine’s jealousy against me, by telling her of some of my ‘ amourettes ’ at Venice ? but it was evident something had gone wrong with the Maréchal, for he was by no means in the best of all possible humours ; and what do you think ? he had the impertinence to call me a fool ! But adieu,—au revoir ! ” And the ex-

ambassador pursued his way, waging war with the trees, and singing that charming ‘refrain’ of his own composition,—

“ Hélas ! parmi tant de si beaux yeux,
Pour me mettre bien sur à l’abri ;
Il faut à quelques-uns faire mes adieux,
Car me partager je ne puis !”

“ I marvel the Signor Magini,—since I find it is that celebrated personage whom I have the honour of addressing,”—said Ignatius, “ should not have let that insufferable ‘ freluquet,’ the Marquis de Millepros, know in plain French his opinion of him.”

“ You know, padre,” replied Magini, “ that when the Florentines play their favourite game of pallone, they always strike the big balls with a guarded arm. Mankind strongly resemble pallone balls,—as the direction of both greatly depends upon those from whom they receive their impetus : and the *follies* of the one, as well as the *follies* of the other, require equally to be struck with a guarded arm, if the striker would not entail a rebound on himself.”

“ I believe you are right, signor,” said the Jesuit, “ but now that I have discovered who

you are, will you allow me to consult you professionally, at any hour that may suit your convenience? say to-morrow: as you tell me I am not to quit Paris till the day after."

"Impossible!" replied Magini, taking a glass of Néroli* from a grisette, who was handing that and other beverages about; "impossible! for I have three appointments to-night; and to-morrow I shall be all day at the Louvre. But before we part,—now, on the spot,—I can tell you what you wish to know: You have two great objects in life,—the first, revenge against the heads of the Venetian nobles, and the Cappello family, for the part they took in your brother's imprisonment, some years ago; the second, the attaining to a cardinal's hat: this latter you will obtain through the medium of Bianca Cappello,—and beware how you include her in your hatred of the rest of her family, for through her aggrandisement will ultimately come your revenge on the Venetian nobles!"

"Pardon me, signor, if I observe," said

* A sort of essence extracted from oranges, much in vogue at that time, stronger than modern orange-flower water, diluted and drank with sugar.

Ignatius, much astonished at Magini's accurate knowledge of his long-cherished but most secret feelings ; “ Pardon me if I observe that I do not see how Bianca Cappello can rise any higher in the scale of degraded aggrandisement than she has done,—for, though her influence over Francesco de Medici increases daily, yet he can scarcely carry his folly so far as to brave the court of Austria, by repudiating Joan ; and, if he did, the Pope would never consent to the scandal of a double divorce, to facilitate his marriage with Bianca.”

“ And think you not,” replied Magini, while a cold smile flitted over his pale, still features, like moonlight over a monumental statue ; “ think you not that Fate can grant more effectual divorces than the Pope ? Bonaventuri’s days are already numbered ; and Time, which is Fate’s prime minister, will do the rest. But the sun is now setting, and I have business out at the abbey of St. Denis ; so farewell, padre, —and if you would arrive at the goal of your wishes, *spare Bianca Cappello !* ”

“ Farewell, signor ! ” echoed the Jesuit, who,

wishing to obtain some clue to the astrologer's movements, added, "May I hope that, when we meet again, it will be among the peaceful vineyards of Tuscany?"

"See you yon faint red streak in the sky, just above the evening star?" asked Magini, pointing upwards as he spoke.

"Yes; what of it?" said Ignatius.

"That portends wars, and rumours of wars. The next time we meet it will be amid the blood and carnage of the battle-field."

And, so saying, Magini turned down an avenue, and disappeared.

"Strange! most strange!" said Ignatius, aloud; "what should bring either him or me amid the slaughter of war? However, my faith in all the rest will be confirmed, or shaken, by my finding, or not finding, the Queen's counter-order for the journey into Normandy to-morrow, on my return to the hostelry." And so saying, Ignatius returned to the arbour where he had left Salinas; and giving him his arm, quitted the gardens of the 'Mille feuilles.' After conducting Salinas to his lodgings, near Nôtre Dame, he retraced, with a quickened pace, his

steps to his inn, the ‘Bon Roy Dagobert,’ in the Rue de la Pomme d’Or.

Immediately under the sign of his inn sat Claude Pajon, the aubergiste, shelling beans, an occupation from which he however desisted on the approach of the Jesuit, in order to present him with a letter sealed with the royal arms, which had been brought, as he said, by a court page. Ignatius tore it open,—it was a command to dine at the Louvre on the following day, and not to quit Paris till the day after, as Catherine de Medici’s letters for Florence were not ready.

CHAPTER IV.

“Elle ne put souffrir de perdre une conquête si glorieuse. Combien de femmes n'y a-t-il pas qui pensent de même qu'elle, et qui ne ressentent la perte d'un amant, que par la douleur, et le dépit que souffre leur amour-propre?”

**LETTRES CABALISTIQUES DU SEIZIEME SIECLE,
ENTRE ABUKILIAK, ET BEN KIBER.**

CAUSES are so linked together in this world, that our free-will is only available at the outset of our career. Well may it be said, “Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte,” in more senses than one; for *one* false step, or wrong act, so thoroughly subverts the mechanism of our very nature, that independence even of thought becomes a chimera, and instead of being able to overcome circumstances, they master us. One error places the events of a whole life in a false juxtaposition; effects and results compel our actions; but had we not, either through folly or crime, given a wrong

impetus to, or created causes, such effects and such results would never have ensued. Nobody is *obliged* to run down a steep mountain ; but once let him begin, and the power of stopping becomes impossible, consequently the choice of doing so no longer rests with him. Bianca felt this bitterly, in the headlong and downward career on which she had entered ; nay, she felt more, for she had arrived at that climax of mortal anguish, the living to regret ; having replaced the honest sorrows which made her the victim, by the crimes which wrecked, but could not avenge. The prosperity which Cosimo Primo's sinewy and industrious policy had bequeathed to Tuscany, was every day dwindling into additional impotence, and the people succumbing under the exhaustion of heavy imposts and taxation, which drained them without lightening the enormous debt with which the state was burdened, under the luxury, indolence, extravagance, and misrule of Francesco de Medici, who cared little how those at home murmured, or those abroad threatened, as long as the rose-leaves of his own sybarite existence remained unerumpled. But the re-

monstrances and discontent of his brothers, from which he could not escape, annoyed and provoked him seriously; for instead of producing the salutary effect of arousing him from the disgraceful and destructive moral lethargy into which he was plunged, all expostulations on their part only served to widen the breach between them, and make the Grand Duke lament incessantly, that having had no children by his wife, his brother, the Cardinal, must become his heir; this source of discontent at length became a positive ‘monomania’ with him, and he was always repeating to Bianca that he was the most miserable of men; for that had he even an illegitimate son, he would soon legitimize him, and proclaim him his heir; for he had but one object, that of defeating the ambition of his brothers. It was therefore, with regret and dismay, that she beheld his daily increasing gloom and dejection, which even she, it appeared, had lost the art of dissipating. Her disquietude arose, not from the fear of losing his affections (for, for those she had never cared), but from the dread of not being able to retain her empire over him;—for having in a fatal

moment deviated from the narrow right path (in which even for the most unfortunate, there are always some green spots, and some fair prospects, however distant), she had set her fate upon *one* cast, and if she lost that, she lost *all*. Fearful indeed is the void which our uprooted affections leave, and which no ambition, however high, or however wide, can fill ; for the heart is no phœnix, and never rises again from its own ashes ;—but from those ashes there rise, at most, vague and unsubstantial phantoms, which flit through the poor ruin, and serve only to haunt and goad the memory that still survives. Where once the tempter has entered in, he but too easily finds a readmission. Infected by Francesco's constant regrets, and alarmed by his reiterated assurances, that rather than his brothers should succeed him, he would bequeath the Duchy of Tuscany to an illegitimate son, Bianca began to wish as ardently as he could do, that she might be the mother of the future Grand Duke ; but despairing of being so in reality, once, and only once, the dark idea crossed her mind of substituting the child of some peasant, whose

poverty might be tempted by money to abandon it ; but she instantly rejected this thought as base and unworthy. Although she never again, even to herself, would own that such an idea had crossed her mind ; yet, in spite of herself, the unacknowledged substance of it preyed upon her, and banished sleep from her eyes, and bloom from her cheek, till at length Francesco began to remark her altered looks, with (as her quick fears thought) less of tenderness than vexation.

She was one day sitting alone in a subterranean grotto or cavern (which still exists as it then was), in the Villa Strozzi, somewhat more dejected than usual, for the Duke had not been for two whole days,—an eternity, according to their former intercourse—every change in which, however trifling, made her tremblingly suspect that she was tottering to her fall ; and never having been well since her father's death, everything, however trivial in itself, affected her strongly.

“ Yes,” said she, in answer to her own thoughts, as she leant on a rustic table, and sat opposite to the wax figure of a mimic hermit,

whose glass eyes were devoutly fixed on a large open volume before him, while apparently he had achieved the miracle of making time stand still, as the sands never slipped through the hour-glass, which, with a human skull and the book before him, completed all his chattles,—“Yes, it is evident he loves me no longer! If I were starving, no doubt I should have plenty of children; see that poor blind child Ugolino, how he has lived on through everything,—but had his parents had a kingdom to leave him, no doubt he would have been sickly, died young, or perhaps never have been born,—what would I not give that even that poor blind orphan were my son!”

It is a sad truth, but true as sad, that our bad thoughts or evil intentions are seldom without some fostering aid to bring them to maturity, while, alas! our good ones have no such ministering angels. No, no, they are nouns-substantive, and stand alone in that metaphysical grammar, called *the mind*. Bianca had scarcely uttered the last wish, before the leaves of the book before the hermit were violently stirred, as with a sudden current of air. On raising

her eyes, when startled by this sound, she beheld rising, as her distempered imagination thought, out of the earth, just behind the figure of the hermit, the hideous apparition of Giovannina Neri, whom she had not seen since the day she had released her from prison. The hag had the same blackthorn stick that she had stumped about with in the podesta, and her wardrobe seemed by no means improved. Her coarse gray hair was not concealed by the decent shelter of either coif or hat, but stood up in a sort of pyramidal maze.

“It is your own fault, bellissima, if you do not play the part of mother to a fairer child than ever Ugolino was, or ever will be,” said Giovannina, as she advanced towards Bianca, rubbing her skinny hands and lighting up her distorted features with an appalling grin.

“What mean you, gossip?” asked Bianca.

“I know it all,” replied the hag, approaching more nearly, and lowering her voice, “all Francesco de Medici’s discontent at having no son, and all your griefs and fears at such being the case. But your fears are at the wrong side; you fear to do that which would end all fear.

But, cheer up, long before you were born it was decreed that I should come to your assistance at this crisis. Aye ! you stare, and in your heart you marvel,—but leave both staring and marvelling, and *listen*. That you may know I do not speak at random, I'll tell you who I was, and what I am. I was nurse to the Signorina Ferrai, and continued living with the poor child after she had the misfortune to make, what her friends considered, such a fine match ; that is, after she became the wife of Martin Bernardini's brother ;—poor youth—I mean the Signor Carlo Benardini, for he was fair and open as a May morning, and doted on his wife. But in some families that is a crime, though not one that gentlemen of his rank are often guilty of. Be that as it may, his love for the signora was wormwood to his brother Martin, who could not get him to enter into any of his own ambitious schemes, and who never forgave him for marrying, what he called, so much below him ; though, heaven knows, the Signora Arianna was good enough for the Grand Duke himself, much less for the Gonfaloniere's younger brother. However, when

Martin Bernardini found that neither threats nor bribes could turn Signor Carlo from his quiet home, his anger grew to hatred, and his hatred to revenge ; the first symptom of which was his sudden civility to me : not a holiday occurred, but I was sure to receive some present from the Gonfaloniere. These presents, which were at first Hebrew to me, soon became translated pretty plainly, by his asking me to do him the favour of poisoning his brother. Nothing, he said, could be so easy as for me to mingle with his wine a certain Ethiopian fluid that he would give me, one drop of which was sufficient to render deadly a whole flask of wine ; and that this poison differed from all others, inasmuch as that detection was impossible, as it left no trace, not even the slightest, externally or internally on the victims ; for which reason it had received the name of the *inscrutible* among those conversant in poisons. He further added, that the Borgias had used it with impunity for years, and that it was not until they had taken to the use of that vulgar drug, arsenic, that they ever were detected. I listened to the wretch thus far from a stupe-

faction of horror, that deprived me of all power of utterance ; but, at length recovering myself, I rejected his vile proposal with scorn, poured on him a torrent of indignation, and flung him back his ill-omened gifts.

“ But I might have spared myself the trouble, for shortly after my young master was murdered. He was scarcely cold in his untimely grave—I was ill in bed, and my poor mistress within three months of her confinement—when I remember one night, towards midnight, some masked bravos—emissaries no doubt of Martin Bernardini—entered the house and forcibly carried off my dear young mistress, who was sitting by my bed-side. I screamed ; and, springing from the bed, opposed my feeble struggles against the four masked ruffians, who were armed to the teeth. You may imagine how ineffectual was such a resistance. From that fatal night I never beheld my poor foster-child more. From all I can gather, my illness ended in a brain fever ; but when I recovered my bodily strength (for at times my head wandered), I found myself stretched on my own bed, in my own cottage, with my brother-in-

law (for I was at that time a widow), who was a poor ‘contadino,’ and Isolina, his wife, attending me. Though I dared not openly express my hatred of Martin Bernardini—for *power* is the most dangerous edged tool that the friendless and the poor can meddle with—yet I became consumed with a burning desire for *revenge!* I wandered about under the influence of this feeling, like one possessed, and incapable of doing any thing. At length, as if to open to me a vista of hope, I heard marvels of the skill of a great astrologer and soothsayer, one Signor Magini. I went to him, and he told me it would be years before I should have my revenge on the Gonfaloniere, and then that it would be more a prospect of thwarting some of his designs, than an ample revenge. He assured me, however, that Martin Bernardini had not actually murdered my mistress, neither was she then dead ; but that he had forced on her a second marriage, of so revolting a nature, that it would be the cause of her death ; but where she was, or to whom she was married, he positively refused to tell me. But now comes my revenge ! and my

triumph!—aye, and *your* triumph, too, Bianca,—for he told me that it was to be a grandson of *mine* that would be selected to be the future Grand Duke of Tuscany, though *not* as my grandson, but as the reputed son of Francesco de Medici (mark you, at that time Cosimo Primo still reigned); and throwing into two silver braziers a powder, which caused a most fragrant odour, but dense vapour, Magini withdrew a dark curtain from before a large mirror, and bade me behold the lady for whose son my grandson should pass: when lo! I beheld you—you, Lady Bianca—as plainly as I now behold you; though you could not, at that time, have been more than a year old, if so much. I then importuned him to know where and when I should meet with you? He would not tell me the exact time,—but he told me it would not be for many years, and that I should first see you in a prison,—and was it not so? ha! ha! ‘*bellina!*’” continued the old woman, seeing Bianca’s unfeigned astonishment. “Now you begin to believe! now you see, that Giovannina Neri is neither mad nor a witch!—though I have twice been subjected to

the ordeal for witchcraft ; three times banished from Tuscany ; and twice imprisoned on suspicion of the same. But the prisons were my paradise ! for in them I always had the hope of meeting you ; and you see I was not disappointed. For the rest, I passed my time in telling fortunes, or living upon the credulity of others, which gained me the reputation of a sorceress. I say the credulity of others, for I had no real knowledge ; I had not, like Magini, learnt creation by heart. Nevertheless, my renown was great ; and among the most constant of my votaries was the late Marchesa Strozzi. Poor soul ! many a time and oft has she met me, at noon and at night, in this very grotto ; and many a time have I, when hunted almost to the death, taken refuge from my persecutors in the caverns of this villa, whose every winding I know as well as the lineaments of my own child. But now I must return to you : ever since the day that you released me from the Podesta, I have haunted this grotto, where alone I could behold you without being seen,—for your face was to me like a vision of heaven ; not so much from its beauty, wondrous

as that is, as from its being the bright impersonation of the glorious dream of many years. It is as if the flowers (for what else are our fair but perishable hopes?) which I had cast upon life's stream in youth, had miraculously returned to me in age, as fresh and as sweet as when they and I were both in our spring——But, tush ! What have I to do with tears?" said the old woman, brushing one away with the back of her withered hand, "I shed them all—all—to the very last, when Arianna and her husband died ; for I knew I should never want them again ; nor have I,—and less now than ever : for we should laugh!—for are we not going to win ? For years, like all those who are too wretched, I felt that I had no fate : for I had an existence without a life,—and it is only in life that there is destiny. But I have resuscitated, to learn the truth of the saying, that God never effaces but to re-write ; and now I, even I, live again ! and have a career before me. For months I have been an invisible auditor of Francesco de Medici's lamentations at being childless ; but it was only yesterday that my youngest daughter announced to me,

with tears in her eyes, that she was again about to become a mother. Being wretchedly poor, and not having had a child for fifteen years,—since the birth of poor Beppo,—the lame boy, whom you saw under my window the day you visited the prison,—she is wonderfully afflicted at the circumstance. But not so I, who know the great destiny of this unborn child. And now do you see what you have to do?" asked Giovannina.

"Not exactly," said Bianca, pale and trembling, while her blood seemed curdling into ice in her veins.

"Then, by the Madonna! you are duller than I thought you," rejoined the hag; "but as you do not know your lesson, I will teach it to you. You have not now to learn that the Cardinal de Medici hates you; but perhaps you may not be aware that Martin Bernardini is his bosom friend and adviser, and that in no one point are they so unanimous as upon the expediency of achieving your downfall;—and take care that they have not already advanced far towards it! The wrongs of the Grand Duchess, on the one hand, is a fair and plausible

motive for their dislike, to place before the public,—for men never lack virtuous labels, or just cause, for all the evil they do. On the other, an affected sympathy with the disappointment of the Duke at having no heir ; and the constant hints of Martin Bernardini (for the Cardinal of course keeps clear of that scandal), that with another mistress he might be more fortunate, cannot fail, in time, to produce their effect. Now do you see what you should do ?”

“ No,” said Bianca, faintly; as if the thought that, by making every suggestion come from her strange counsellor, she could lessen the crime of her acceding to them ; which the old woman’s last insidious allusions to the Cardinal’s hatred of, and machinations against, her, had made her more than ever inclined to do.

“ No ! again,—’tis incomprehensible, that so keen a wit should be so suddenly blunted by that which should whet it most—its own interest. But now let us reverse the medal ; think you that all the Cardinal’s sermons, or the Gonfaloniere’s hints, would weigh one feather with the Duke, if you were to place within his arms an heir to all his greatness ? Your silence

gives the proper answer, they could not. You have only then to announce to him to-day, or the next time you see him, the joyous intelligence, that in six months from this, his fondest hopes will be realized ; and then *your reign* will be more triumphant, and more secure than ever.”

“ But—but—” at length faltered Bianca, seeing that Giovannina paused for her reply ; “ supposing—mind I only say *supposing*—that I were to accede to so wild a scheme, how can you be sure that your daughter will have a son ? ”

“ How can I be sure that the sun shines ? or that I am now speaking to you ? but as sure as I am of these facts, so am I of the other ; at all events, you need not alarm yourself on that score, for you have only to make the announcement to the Duke, and I will take care to enable you to fulfil your promise.”

The tempter had triumphed, as he always does when he is listened to.

“ But this Signor Magini, that you mentioned, could I not first see and consult him ? ”

“ Impossible ! he is away at the court of

France, for the Queen Catherine de Medici sets great store by his predictions, as well she may."

"Did he positively say," asked Bianca, her finger still pressed upon her lip, as if deliberating, which, according to good authority, is always the prelude to a woman's being lost, "did he positively that your grandson *would be Duke of Tuscany?*"

"The exact words that I before repeated to you, were, that *he would be chosen to be Grand Duke of Tuscany*, and that is the same thing."

"Not quite," thought Bianca, as she sat racked between the conflicting vacillations of hope and fear, the lingering virtue that pleaded for the right, and the subtle devil that goaded to the wrong.

Five minutes passed, and still the fair Venetian was silent.

"Come, come!" said the hag, in a hoarse voice, striking her ragged black-thorn staff impatiently on the ground, "your answer!"

"Only give me till to-morrow," said Bianca.

“ Now, or never !” interrupted Giovannina, in a voice that seemed to rend the very rocks of the cavern.

Before Bianca could reply, she heard the Duke’s well-known whistle, for it was the fashion of the day to wear whistles in the form of small silver birds, and whenever Francesco could not find her in the house, he always sought her in the grounds, or the grotto, announcing his arrival by the voice of his silver herald.

“ Go, for heaven’s sake !—here is the Duke,” cried she.

“ I do not stir from this without my errand,” said the old woman sternly, sinking, however, down behind the high-backed chair, which, with the hermit’s dress, completely concealed her.

She had scarcely ensconced herself in this retreat, before Ghiriluzzo entered, announcing the Grand Duke ; which he had no sooner done than he quitted the grotto.

“ It is an age since I have seen you,” said Francesco, listlessly, as if, at all events, it had been a very peaceful age to him.

Bianca, somewhat piqued at the indifferent tone in which this was said, replied rather coldly: “ And whose the fault, my lord ? ”

“ Not mine—I was harassed to death yesterday, and the day before, with that eternal Spanish American loan ; and then Ferdinando is always pulling the Vatican about my ears ; and then my worthy subjects are as sulky as bears, and as hard to please as a wife ! ”

“ And to-day, ‘ caro mio,’ for it is now late, have you been equally occupied to-day ? ”

“ Why—yes, but somewhat more pleasantly, it must be confessed ; for Martin Bernardini took me to see a young Roman beauty, who has just arrived—Laura Colonna—and, certes, for once report is no liar, for she is passing fair. But how pale you look, Bianca ; you have often looked so of late. I wish you would try the baths of Monte Cattino, or those of Lucca ; —do dearest ! ”

There was in these last words of the Duke that combination of inflammable atoms, which, when they fall upon such combustible matter as suspicion and jealousy, instantly produce such dire and tremendous results, as no ordi-

nary causes, however great, can achieve. The torch had now been put to the previously laid train, in Bianca's mind, and the fire must have its way, even though she herself should be its first victim. Francesco de Medici had been to see Laura Colonna, and she was beautiful,—that was the first, great and apparent peril: then *she* was looking ill, and had *often done so of late* (he need not have laid such a discordant stress on the words); this was the second disagreeable fact in the Duke's speech: but the poison, that was, as it generally is, in the dregs of the cup—he wished she would go to the baths of Lucca or Monte Cattino; no doubt that he might bestow his then vacant time on the beautiful Laura Colonna! This was decisive; the evil one had gained the victory, and Bianca turned her now crimson face away from the man whom she at that moment almost fancied she loved, so great was the pain it gave her to deceive him, or so great the fear of losing him.

“ I have looked ill for some time,” she stammered out, as she hid her face upon the Duke's shoulder; “ but—but you will not be sorry to

hear that there is a cause for it. In six months, perhaps, you may have all you wish, and then you will not mind my ill looks,—will you, caro ?”

Here Giovannina, from her hiding-place, could not repress a short cachinnatory symptom of triumphant joy !

“ What on earth was that ? ” cried the Duke, stopping suddenly short in the expressions of delight and affection he was going to give utterance to at this announcement of Bianca.

“ Oh nothing, love, but the cry of one of the innumerable colony of owls and bats that inhabit this cave.”

Too happy in the intelligence he had just heard to give the strange noise a second thought, Francesco de Medici fondly passed his arm round Bianca’s waist to lead her into the sunshine, as he said, “ You must not indeed, dearest, you must not pass so much of your time in this damp grotto. Remember, I forbid it ! Oh, dear—dearest Bianca—if you only knew how happy you have made me !”—

“ And what style of beauty is Laura Colonna ? ” asked Bianca, gathering a handful of

myrtle blossoms as she passed, and burying her face in them, while she fixed her eyes on the Duke.

“ Oh ! never mind Laura Colonna ;—fair—no, dark. Upon my word I forget—that is, I scarcely remarked her.”

“ What ! and yet you discovered that she was so beautiful ?”

“ Well, I was wrong. There’s no one beautiful but my own Bianca.” And then, pursuing his own thoughts aloud, he added, “ I shall like to see Ferdinando’s and the Gonfaloniere’s faces when I tell them of it.”

When they reached the house, the Duke’s pages inquired if he was ready for his horses ?

“ No, they may be put up. I shall sup here to-night,” he replied.

“ I think your Highness forgets that you promised to honour the Gonfaloniere with your company at supper to-night,” said the page.

“ Let him know that I have changed my mind, and that I have business to transact with him at nine to-morrow morning.”

“ And also inform him,” added Bianca, with somewhat of the arrogance, and not a

little of the assurance of her newly-regained and much increased power, "that *I* should like a military mass in Santa Croce to-morrow."

"Don't forget," cried the Duke, calling after the page, "that the Signora would like a military mass at Santa Croce, to-morrow."

From that day, the more numerous and extraordinary were the whims and requests of Bianca Cappello, the more pleased was Francesco de Medici.

CHAPTER V.

“We ransack tombs for pastime ; from the dust
 Call up the sleeping hero ; bid him tread
 The scene for our amusement.” YOUNG.

— “On le verra dans ma péroration.
 Sur ce fameux combat jusque-là je me joue ;
 Mais naturellement tout cela se dénoue,
 Et je viens à mon fait.”

LES VENDANGES, *par Regnard.*

TOWARDS the close of a crisp autumnal evening, on the seventh day from their leaving Paris, Ignatius Dragoni, a royal guard of two hundred Swiss, the Marquis de Millepropos, his valet, barber (for at that time these offices were performed by separate functionaries), his ‘chef,’ ‘confesseur,’ ‘boulanger,’ sumpter mules and pack-horses (as in those days ‘fourgons’ were not), approached the small town of Dreux, in Normandy.

“I think, Monsieur le Marquis,” said the

Jesuit, who was riding beside him, “ notwithstanding the red glare of the sky towards the west, the clouds are very black over the hills, and promise us a good drenching if we push on to the Château de Quillac to-night, as it is full twelve leagues further. What say you? Shall we advance and meet the storm, or seek the hospitality of the village inn? Mine host of the ‘ Bon Roy D’Agobert’ at Paris assured me that I should not find a better hostelry in Dreux than ‘ l’Auberge du Chante Poulet, kept by his brother, Pierre Pajon.’ ”

“ Parbleu! je le crois,” said the Marquis; “ inasmuch as there is no other. Diable! what was that?” cried he, as a heavy booming sound rolled through the air.

“ It must have been distant thunder,” replied Ignatius.

“ Then that decides the question in favour of the Chante-Poulet at once,” said the Marquis. “ But listen! there it is again: by the helmet of Mars it is cannon and not thunder. Ho, friend!” added he, reining in his horse, and addressing a peasant who sat crying by the

road-side, and who, by his hat, was evidently a Huguenot, “what is the meaning of this cannonading in this quiet little town?”

“ Quiet, indeed!” rejoined the peasant, “is it possible, seigneur, that you have not heard of the dreadful battle fought at Dreux to-day? the Maréchal de Saint-André, they say, is killed! and the Prince de Condé and Duc de Montmorenci are taken prisoners. So now it is all up with us, since the Duc de Guise has gained the victory; and I am only waiting here till some one comes and tells me whether my son, who is a soldier in the army of the Prince de Condé (God bless him! though he is a prisoner) is killed.”

“ Non, mon père, me voilà sain et sauf!” said a young man, clearing the hedge as he spoke, but with his cuirass much bulged, and a sabre wound across his forehead, from which the blood was streaming, and which his handkerchief, that he had tucked under his helmet, was insufficient to staunch; “ but alas! our brave Prince is taken; however, they have allowed him the attendance of two of his own

soldiers, and, thank Heaven ! I am one of the two ; so now that I have seen you, father, I must be gone."

" Mercy on me, François, but you are wounded !" exclaimed the father, as soon as he had disengaged himself from the embrace of his son.

" Pooh ! a mere scratch, that the Sieur Fernel,* who is with our army, will soon make as fair as a lady's hand, though I am of opinion that it is no honourable wound gained in battle, but merely my mother's attempt to eat me when she saw me safe," said the young soldier, as he laughingly wrung the blood from his handkerchief.

" So," said the peasant, with a somewhat mortified look, " though you promised if God spared your life, to come to me the moment the battle was over, yet you went to your mother first ?"

" I did, father, because she was my mother ; so, vive le Prince de Condé !" said the young

* Fernel was chirurgeon and physician to Henry the Second of France, and wrote a celebrated treatise, entitled "De abditis Rerum Causis."

soldier, shaking his father by the hand, and preparing again to clear the hedge.

“Un moment, mon brave,” said the Marquis de Millepropos, who, amid all his folly, had had too much good feeling to interrupt this little scene between the father and son; “one moment,”—and he placed in the soldier’s hand two gold pieces. “I think you said the Duc de Guise had gained the victory? I rejoice at it: for he is not only a staunch Catholic, but a particular friend of mine.”

“Is he so, seigneur,” said the young man, flinging down the two gold pieces that the Marquis had given him; “then all I can say is, that I despise your friend as much as your gold:” and the next moment the soldier was out of sight.

“Ventre bleu! but your son is a bear, old fellow,” cried the Marquis, turning to the peasant; and then putting spurs to his horse. But the guard soon called after him to halt, as their horses were too tired to keep pace with him. This slow mode of proceeding brought them to sunset before they reached the outskirts of the town, which seemed enveloped in

a flame-coloured mantle, lined with black, from the red glare of the setting sun, amid a funereal procession of dark clouds. Before they entered the town, they had to traverse some large ‘prés,’ or meadow lands ; but prior to reaching them, the air was impregnated with a strong smell of gunpowder, and a hazy sort of flitting vapour, which set the horses of the troopers snorting, neighing, and pawing the earth. A short turn in the road soon brought them before the frightful cause of these effects : for it brought them to the field where one of the most sanguinary battles of those terrible civil wars had that day been fought. The further end of the field was still so enveloped in the steam of human life, and the smoke of that which had terminated it, as to render all that was passing there invisible at a short distance ; but above the groans of the wounded and the dying, rose the rumbling sound of the heavy artillery, as it was with difficulty driven off the spongy ground, that was saturated with blood. Here might be seen a dead Catholic, with a monk holding a crucifix to his cold lips ; and there a dying Huguenot, with a clergyman

praying beside him ;—while, on all sides, were hecatombs of horses. Here and there, seated on a cannon, were armourers, hammering on bulged greaves and breast plates, as calmly as if they had been pursuing their avocations in their own workshops. The evening was now closing in,—so, in addition to these groups, there began to flit about, with quick, yet stealthy, movements, those human vultures who prey upon the dead, and carry on their sepulchral pillage amid carnage and blood. But above all the mournful and murmuring sounds of the ensanguined field, arose the distant, clear, compact echoes of the cavalry, on their way through the town to their different barracks, or billets. The Jesuit's mule, unused to such scenes and sounds, had given such unequivocally refractory symptoms of his decided objection to proceeding any further, that his master thought it best to dismount and lead it. Ignatius still encountered one almost insurmountable obstacle to his progression, in the slimy and slippery state the ground was in, from the gore with which it had been deluged. Though by no means made of

the most “ penetrable stuff,” yet, as his sandals sunk into the earth, there was something awfully revolting in thus wading ankle deep through blood. And, as the flushed clarisons of the trumpet of victory sounded from the headquarters of the Duc de Guise’s army, and found its truest echoes in the groans of the dying and the lamentations of the living, he could not help saying to himself, “ And is it of necessity that the tissue of happiness, or of success, woven for one half mankind, must ever be woofed with the misery or the subjugation of the other half?”

But his reverie was interrupted by a soliloquy from the Marquis de Millepropos, who had reined in his horse, to prevent its trampling the corse of the Maréchal de Saint André.

“ Poor Saint André ! so there you lie ! and a braver never died, nor ever lived. I little thought, when I gave your son good advice, about a week ago, at that ‘ poltron ’ of a court, from which I am now about to retire in disgust, that he would so soon have to act his father’s part,—that is to fill your place. ‘ Mais la vie,

c'est une énigme, dont la mort nous apprend le mot.' "

"Really, Monsieur le Marquis," said Ignatius, with a look of astonishment, "that last remark of yours is as true as it is profound."

"Very possibly, mon père, but it is not mine. I heard it from the lips of a worthy curé, in the only sermon I ever went to since I have come to years of discretion; and see the good of not overloading one's mind with discourses of that nature; I have remembered it; and not liking to be totally unprovided with something pious and consolatory, whenever a death occurred in the family of any of my friends I have always applied it; and, finding it so successful on one melancholy occasion, I thought it might serve another: so, when any young man, about my own age, sacrifices himself in marriage, I always say to him 'Ecoutez, mon ami, l'amour c'est un énigme, dont le mariage nous apprendra le mot; mais ce n'est pas un bon mot.' Adieu, my dear Saint André! but much as I grieve to part with you, I cannot push my politeness so far as to say that I hope we may soon meet again."

And so saying, the Marquis went through the ceremony of applying his handkerchief to his eyes, and actually observed a decorous silence for the next five minutes, which his companion felt no inclination to break,—but which, however, was broken by the frantic screams of a woman, who, while she knelt with one arm round the neck of a dying soldier, whose head she supported on her knee with the other, endeavoured to ward off the approach of a short burley looking man, muffled in a dark long riding cloak, while she cried in shrill, yet broken accents, “Touch him at your peril,—he is *not* dead; but I will die before you shall loosen one rivet of his armour. Monster! are there not enough dead victims for your rapacity in this wide slaughter-house, without attacking the living?”

“Nonsense, mistress,” said the ruffian, attempting to use force, “it is getting late; and why haggle about five minutes? for I tell you that is the uttermost time he can live—and the devil himself would not give one spark of fire longer purchase for his soul; but as far as any love gauds—such as a hair chain, or a ring

with a heart hid 'neath a posey, that you may have given him—go, you shall have them back, if that's what you want. So come, now don't be unreasonable."

But just as he was about to oppose the force of his sinewy arm to the pale, feeble, and attenuated hand of the wretched woman, Ignatius rushed between them, and felled him to the earth; while the Marquis de Millepropos contented himself with reining in his horse, and exclaiming, while he caressed his beard, "Bravo! tu as bien fait; c'est un homme sauvage, grossier, enfin sans gallanterie!"

Suddenly rising, the man was about to close with the Jesuit, when he started back, exclaiming, "Father of Moses! how like José Agnado!"

"' Nullum simile quod idem est,'* though I doubt that too; for you are more like yourself than ever, *honest* Giovanni Ferrai," said Ignatius; "equally expert at robbing a church or a church-yard; but though dead men tell no tales, *living ones can*. So come, my fine

* Nothing is like that is the same.

fellow, instead of robbing this poor dying man, out with every stiver of your already packed plunder : or I have got a *certain silver key*," added he, in a whisper, " which, with the aid of the inquisition, will help me to your most secret and securely hidden treasures."

At the first mention of the silver key, to say nothing of the inquisition, the Venice goldsmith (for he it was, who, having been appointed jailor over Arianne, at the château de Quillac, by Vittorio Cappello, had taken the opportunity of the battle of Dreux for indulging his thirst for ill-gotten wealth) took to his heels ; not, however before he had fairly turned his pockets inside out ; thereby disburdening them of sundry well filled purses, diamond rings, loops of aigrettes, gold spurs, and aiguillettes.

" Ah, the villain who spoiled my likeness !" said the Marquis, looking after Ferrai, " homme capable de tout !"

" See," said Ignatius to the woman, who had again turned her streaming eyes on the dying soldier, apparently unconscious of all else, now that the annoyance which had threatened him

was over—" See how wisely Providence ordains that out of evil should come good ! Instead of being robbed, you are all this the richer," added he, placing the goldsmith's plunder in her lap.

" Alas ! father," replied the poor woman, bursting into a fresh paroxysm of grief, " I do not want gold—I want what gold cannot buy—hope—life !"

" That, daughter, is in the gift of God alone."

" True," said a voice, which the Jesuit recognized, " true ; but God sometimes bestows the gift through human means,"—and turning round, he beheld Magini. Ignatius started, as he remembered his prediction. His dress was precisely the same as that in which he had last seen him, with the exception of a large-leaved beaver riding hat, and a pair of buff riding boots, with broad roweled gold spurs ; but his rich black velvet cloak and doublet were as new and untravelstained, as if he had been fresh from his toilette, instead of off a journey. Without taking any further notice either of the Jesuit or the Marquis de Millepropos, he knelt

down beside the soldier, and taking from his vest a very small bottle, not larger than a large-sized attar-of-rose flask,—which from its exceeding lustre seemed almost as if it had been made of the abstract brilliancy of the diamond without its solid particles,—he said to the woman, “Don’t despair. Where there is but one spark of life, I have seldom known this remedy to fail.” And, so saying, he loosened the dying man’s helmet, held open his mouth, and took especial care to drop *one* drop, and no more, of the elixir into it. He had no sooner done so, merely allowing for the time that it took him to replace this phial within his vest, and draw a larger bottle from his pocket, than the livid hue of the expiring man’s cheeks was exchanged for a gradually mantling glow of returning life; and the dark blood, which had hitherto seemed to stagnate in “cold obstruction” through the veins of his temples, seemed gently to dissolve into the thin fluid of reviving health, as it glided with a temperate and equal flow through its blue channels. Both the woman and Magini watched these favourable symptoms with suspended respiration, lest, like a newly lit

taper when carried through the air, one breath should extinguish all! But, at length, the man opened his eyes, with a gentle sigh, like a person awaking from sleep, and fixing them on the woman, said—

“ Povera Isolina ! poor Isolina !”

But Magini forbad him to speak, and, chafing his temples with some of the contents of the larger bottle, he next steeped some lint in the same, which he placed on the soldier’s forehead, who immediately fell into a quiet but natural slumber, while Magini still continued to support the back of his head with his left hand.

“ Your husband, or brother, (which is it, daughter?) addressed you in Italian,” said Ignatius to the woman, who, though she had not partaken of the elixir, seemed also to have gained additional life.

“ We are Italians, padre—we are Florentines.”

“ Indeed ! then, how came you on this field of battle, and engaged in the civil wars of France ?”

“ Because my husband’s father, who is a

vintner, and richer than he was some years ago, never forgave Roberto for marrying me, as he said my grandmother was a witch ; merely because the poor old soul had, in early life, a fever, which at times has disordered her intellects ever since ;—she has been barbarously imprisoned, and hunted three times from Florence by the persecutions of my father-in-law, Cesare Cinti, who led us such a life, that we at length made our escape into France, where, having no means of subsistence, my husband joined the Duke de Guise's army, in which he would this day have died, but for the kind assistance of this charitable gentleman."

" May I ask," said Ignatius, " who was your grandmother ?"

" A poor demented old woman, padre, who had drank of sorrow to the dregs, which often produces madness, but seldom finds toleration : her name was Neri, Giovannina Neri."

" Then by the rood you have some claim on my good offices, daughter ; for I once had the honour of being mistaken for your grandmother, by your amiable father-in-law, Cesare Cinti, who would have bestowed upon me all

the honours of sorcery, such as horse-ponds, hot bars, &c. &c. but for the timely intervention of the Cardinal de Medici, who stood godfather to my identity."

" Then you, padre, are the pilgrim whom Cesare talks of to this day, as being one of my poor grandmother's most diabolical sorceries, which even deceived one of the heads of the church, but could not deceive him!"

" The very same," replied Ignatius.

" Hush!" whispered Magini, gently withdrawing his hand from under the soldier's head, and letting it rest on Isolina's lap; " I think he will do now; but his wounds must be looked to, and as the Sieur Fernel is at the hostelry, I will send a litter for your husband; but should Fernel be too busy, which is probable, he will be in equally safe hands in those of Signor Lambroni, the Duc de Montmorenci's family leech."

" Oh! signor," cried Isolina, clasping her hands, " I would thank you, if I knew how."

" No more of that," said Magini, " my best thanks are in the quiet breathings of that poor soldier, who, I hope, will live to see the folly of

shedding the blood of others, or losing his own in such fierce and unnatural warfare."

So saying, he turned to Ignatius and the Marquis de Millepropos, and bowing gracefully to them as he took off his hat, said—

"Signors, I think we had better proceed with all speed to the inn, for the clouds are gathering fast, and large drops are falling; at all events, I must push on to secure a litter for this poor soldier;—but stop! he may be drenched ere it arrives; surely four of these brave troopers would not mind dismounting, and with a few cloaks and arquebuses, constructing a litter, so that we might take him with us without further delay?"

No sooner said than done, there was a simultaneous movement among the guard; but the four who sprang from their saddles first threw their reins to their comrades, and in an incredibly short space of time constructed a litter, upon which the wounded soldier was gently placed without being awoke, while the grateful Isolina walked by his side, although the Marquis de Millepropos (having made the discovery, since her tears had ceased, that she was

exceedingly pretty) had obligingly offered to take her up behind him.

On reaching the town, Catherine de Medici's two hundred Swiss, who escorted the Marquis Millepropos, found some difficulty in advancing, from the manner in which the narrow streets were already crowded with the cavalry, for whom the barracks were not sufficiently large, and whose destined billets were already preoccupied by the martial law of 'first come first served.' Dreux was in those days a fortified town ; but on either side of the gate of entrance were two large solidly-built round towers or turrets, and over the archway of the gate was a corridor or gallery, which served as a medium of communication from one tower to the other ; which towers, with the gallery, constituted the auberge of the Chante Poulet, where Pierre Pajon filled the double office of landlord and gatekeeper. The rain, which had been threatening so long, now began to fall in good earnest, and while from the windows of one turret of the Chante Poulet were to be seen the heads and hands of several soldiers either drinking or cleaning their arms, the other presented a much more agree-

able prospect to the travellers, that of blazing fires in the two first stories, with briskly turning spits, notwithstanding that they contained whole poultry yards of capons, and parks of pheasants and partridges, with some haunches and hocks of venison,—which seemed to look tenderly towards the former, as if singing, “We have been friends together,”—while various ‘marmitons,’ and stout two-handed damsels with cherry cheeks and snow-white coifs, flitted about with large round wire baskets of freshly washed fish and vegetables.

The lord of the soil is always greater in the eyes of his serfs than the greatest monarch who happens to derive his honours from a more distant quarter; consequently, when Pierre Pajon beheld the Marquis de Millepropos, after so long an absence beyond seas, actually honour his door by alighting at it, the King might (had he been there) have spared himself the trouble of being gracious, for honest Pierre would not even have perceived him, as he stood bowing, till his head nearly touched the ground, to the ‘Seigneur du Village.’ When he at length sufficiently recovered from the over-

powering effects of surprise and respect, the first use he made of his tongue was to exclaim, clasping and wringing his hands, “ Ah, Monsieur le Marquis, if you had but arrived half an hour sooner ! ”

“ Pourquoi, mon brave ? Why, my good fellow ? ” asked the Marquis.

“ Because,” replied mine host, “ the ‘ Chante Poulet ’ is full—full to the eaves. The very swallows have been obliged to turn out and make way for the soldiers ; and by no possible contrivance could I furnish beds for Monsieur le Marquis and his suite.”

“ Morbleu ! then give me a bed and never mind my suite,” said the Marquis.

“ Impossible ! ” cried Pierre Pajon, shaking his head mournfully ; “ for the Duc de Guise and Prince de Condé, who took the field at four o’clock this morning, arrived here an hour ago, half dead with fatigue, and scarcely taking time to finish their supper, retired half an hour since to the only spare bed I had left, where they are now fast asleep.”

“ Vrai ? ” asked the Marquis.

“ Oh, pour ça, if Monsieur le Marquis will

give himself the trouble of coming up stairs, I will soon convince him that I am incapable of denying my house the honour of accommodating him, were it possible."

And, so saying, Pierre Pajon led the way up the narrow, winding, and loudly-creaking stairs, followed by the Marquis; and, on reaching the gallery, gently opened the door of the third room,—where, sure enough, in a low bed, with a high tester, and dark green serge curtains, bound with yellow galloon, and a portrait of the Virgin (which by no means flattered her) suspended at the bed's head, lay the conquered and the conqueror,—the Duc de Guise and the Prince de Condé!—‘dos à dos’ (back to back), snoring almost as loudly as the thunder of their own cannon; with no other separation between them than one of the colours of the Duke's army, which played the part of bodkin.

“Poor Prince!” said the Marquis, with a shrug; “no doubt he slept more calmly last night, for then he did not dream of losing the victory; but, perhaps, it was for the good of his health,—for if these Condés go on as they have begun, they will run the risk of being

poisoned by the density of their own laurels.” For the Marquis de Millepropos, like all his countrymen, felt proud of the valour of even his enemies, provided those enemies were Frenchmen. “ Well,” added the Marquis, on his way down stairs; “ though beds are scarce with you, provisions seem plenty. So even introduce Bondrée, my cook, to your larder, and let me know the result as soon as possible.”

“ Oui, mon seigneur; and perhaps Monsieur le Marquis would have no objection to having a couch placed in the ‘salle de voyageurs,’ where he could sleep, and where the other gentlemen of his party could be accommodated with arm-chairs ? ”

“ A very great objection, Maître Pierre: for I hold that if there is one thing worse than another for the complexion, it is to sleep in a room contaminated with the fumes of wine and animal food,—to say nothing of those sort of impromptu beds, which, from their barbarous infability for accommodating proper pillows, invariably destroy the set of the hair for a whole week. Mais enfin,” concluded the Marquis, throwing himself into an heroic posture, “ such

is the fortune of war ! ‘ et je suis Francais, moi! ainsi vive la guerre ! quand même——’ ”

In order to accommodate some of the Duc de Guise’s cavalry, Pierre Pajon had caused temporary sheds to be erected, with trunks and branches of trees, and roofed with straw, beyond his stables and cow-houses, intending the more luxurious shelter of those buildings for the soldiers belonging to the aforesaid cavalry. Great therefore was his dismay, when, on descending from the two generals’ sleeping apartment, he found that the two hundred Swiss, who had accompanied the Marquis de Millepropos, had taken possession of them ! while Toucan, not content with the quarters that did for his betters, was installed in the stable, bestowing on himself the freedom of rack and manger. Such was the landlord’s displeasure at this state of affairs, that even his respect for the Seigneur de Quillac could not prevent him from venting some of his spleen, by expressing his wonder that Monsieur le Marquis should think it necessary to travel with such a retinue.

“ Entre nous, mon brave,” said the Mar-

quis, with amiable condescension, placing his hand before his right cheek, as he approached his mouth towards Pierre Pajon's ear ; “the Queen Mother, though great as Mark Antony, is nevertheless jealous as Cleopatra ; and finding it impossible to shake a resolution I have taken to shut myself up at Quillac for a year, she insisted upon my being surrounded by her own emissaries.”

“How ! ” said mine host, who now thought the Marquis a greater man than ever ; “la reine mère se damne pour Monsieur le Marquis ? ”

“C'est à dire oui. Mais Monsieur le Marquis se sauve—parbleu ! tout comme voyez, ha ! ha ! ha ! ”

“Ha ! ha ! ha ! ”

And then Pierre Pajon laughed ; and, after him, Monsieur le Marquis laughed ; and then they both laughed together, as they crossed the passage leading to ‘la salle des voyageurs,’ which before they reached, they were intercepted by a wounded soldier, whose wounds Ternel had just dressed, leaving his wife to chafe a very slight one on his cheek with brandy :

"That is the severest blow I've had yet," said the soldier; "to see those insensible rags soaking up that good brandy. One little drop? only give me one little drop, Marie?"

"Not one drop," replied the wife; "you know the Sieur Fernel said it would be the death of you, and that it was the worst enemy you ever had."

"Aye, but the Curé of Quillac, who was here just now, and who evidently thought that I was in advanced guard for the other world, said, that every good Christian ought to be reconciled to his worst enemy before he died. So give me the brandy—there's a good woman. For what would our general say if, after gaining so glorious a victory over the heretics, he was to hear that any of us had not died like Christians, after all?"

But Marie persisted in her refusal, and only began to cry the more; while the Marquis de Millepropos—who slipped into her hand, as he passed, the two François d'ors which the young soldier in the Prince de Condé's army had flung down so indignantly an hour before—said to her husband "Voyez-vous, mon ami, having

promised your wife that you were dying, ‘elle a naturellement peur que les esprits vous revient.’ ”

On arriving at the common room of the ‘Chante Poulet,’ the Marquis found the Jesuit, Magini, and the Sieur Fernel, seated round a blazing fire: the latter was entertaining the two former with his ludicrous Latin dialogue in his ‘*De abditis Rerum Causis*,’ upon the pretended properties and appearance of a fictitious luminous stone, supposed to have been brought from India.* Among several strangers, scattered about the apartment, was one of a tall, slight, and peculiarly elegant figure; the polished steel and costly appendages of whose armour, together with his golden helmet and its snow-white aigrette, had more the appearance of a knight decked for a tournament than of one who had been engaged in the turmoil of a long and sanguinary battle. He seemed to be labouring under that species of anxiety of

* This dialogue begins, “*Omissis seriis liceat mihi tecum parumper urbaniūs jocari,*” and is seasoned with the ponderous pleasantries so much in vogue among the learned of that time.

mind which prevents a person from either sitting or standing still, for he kept pacing the room with folded arms, and stopping every moment at the window to look up at the sky, as if his doing so could induce the rain to cease ; but as the vizard was down, it was impossible to distinguish his features, though, if they bore any relation to his figure, they must have been singularly handsome.

The Marquis de Millepropos taking no interest in the conversation going on at the fire, had his curiosity evidently much excited by the stranger, but had no means of gratifying it beyond addressing conjectures to him about the duration of the rain, which, however, were only answered in monosyllables, and left him as wise as he was before. Supper at length made its appearance, to which the Marquis courteously invited the stranger, who accepted the invitation with a bow, and silently seated himself at the table, raising no more of his vizard than was requisite to leave his mouth at liberty, to receive whatever he conveyed to it. . Notwithstanding that the wine circulated briskly, and the jest passed from lip to lip, and

found an echo in the joyous laugh of the guests, neither seemed to find favour with the stranger, who continued his supper as silently as he had commenced it; and, bowing to the assembly, rose, when he had discussed it, and left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

“However bad things may be, consider what would you do if they were worse.”—PHILOSOPHY FOR OTHERS.

“Il adopta un système de galanterie pénétrante, bien qu'en apparence tempérée, qui pour aller au but par une marche oblique, n'en gagnait pas moins du terrain et surtout n'en perdait jamais.”

LE PARAVANT. “L'ARBRE DE SCIENCE.”
Ouvre (charmant) de Monsieur Charles de Bernard.

SOMEBODY has beautifully remarked (and yet I have the bad taste not to remember who), that “flowers are the angels’ alphabet when they write mysterious truths on hills and fields;” and, to judge by the appearance of those about Dreux, the angels had been busy the morning after the battle described in the last chapter; and if they were commentaries on the work of their destroying brother of the day before, they were numerous enough; for the fields on the other side of the town from that on which the

battle had been fought, were perfectly enamelled with those myriads of fragrant little wild flowers, which one night of spring or autumn rain suffices to create, while the sun, whom no human sorrow can cloud, and no human tears can quench, shone out as brilliantly from his azure palace, as if death had no empire, and the grave no victory.

If a cloud was perceptible anywhere, it was (in spite of himself) on the visage of the Marquis de Millepropos, as he approached the long-deserted halls of his baronial castle of Quillac. After the somewhat restless night he had passed at the Chante Poulet,—restless from four causes, any one of which would have sufficed for the purpose; first, he had taken more wine than usual; next, the identity of the stranger was a source of continually recurring conjecture; thirdly, the idea of being immured within the walls of a solitary castle for a whole twelve-month, with no one to boast about, and what was infinitely worse, no one to boast to; while last, and by no means least, his temporary bed was hard, narrow, populous, creaking, and intolerable.

Within half a league of Quillac, however, the Marquis determined to enter his domains ‘en seigneur,’ as he had quitted them ; therefore, having at the top of his voice hummed a popular madrigal, he assumed all his wonted teratology of manner, and turning to Ignatius, remarked—

“ I think we did wrong in letting that mysterious personage escape last night ; the more I think of it the more I am convinced that he must have been a spy. No man studiously keeps his vizard down for any good purpose. Morbleu ! I ask a thousand pardons of messieurs les maris, but I never concealed my face in my life.”

“ And thus showed them all the *frightful* extent of their danger,” said the Jesuit, with a smile.

“ Yes, I should not have let that vizard enigma escape,” continued the Marquis, purring his own thoughts ; “ however, I am now only a private individual ; but the Queen Mother, and, above all, France will soon feel the effects of being deprived of such a plenipotentiary ! Mais dit done, mon père,” added he, lower-

ing his voice, and riding up quite close to Ignatius, “ do me the favour, when we arrive at Quillac, not to produce the royal warrant ; I will myself take the keys from Bergaro, my seneschal, and deliver them up to you, but as a voluntary act ;—you understand, a *voluntary act.*”

“ Oh, perfectly,” replied the Jesuit, with a smile, “ and provided the Marquis de Mille-propos conforms to all the royal warrant enjoins, I have no wish to exact the rigour of its public enforcement.

“ C'est bien,” said the Marquis, waving his hand, and relapsing into silence, for they were now within sight of the broad lands and rich woods of Quillac, and never had their owner felt less proud of either than he did on the present occasion.

“ What a beautiful view !” exclaimed Ignatius, as the calvadade drew up at the large massive iron park-gates.

“ For you, perhaps,” replied the unfortunate Marquis, “ but I cannot say that I particularly admire the prospect before me.”

“ Allons, Monsieur le marquis, de la philo-

sophie!" said the Jesuit, as the ponderous portals opened wide, and then closed upon them.

" Parbleu ! me voilà valet de pied à la philosophie, for the next year to come."

" Well, I dare say you will not find her a very exacting mistress."

" On the contrary, it requires to have more patience in her service than in any other."

And again the Lord of Quillac relapsed into silence, which would have been unbroken but for the combined noise of the soldiers' armour, the creaking of their saddles, and the echoes of the horses' feet along the green sward.

Previous to arriving at the castle they had to traverse a wood, in which the approach of so numerous a cavalcade disturbed the pheasants, who rose with a startled ricket, till they got beyond the wood, or roosted in the thickest trees.

" Ah ! if one had even a pair of wings in this confounded place," sighed the poor Marquis.

" Cui bono ?" said Ignatius, " for if you had, they most assuredly would have been clipped by the royal warrant till this time twelvemonth,

and you would have had to have worn them as an aigrette."

" Apropos of aigrettes—look !" cried the Marquis, as a turn in the wood brought them in view of the castle, " if there is not our silent knight of the Chante Poulet hovering under the windows of the western turret. Ho, ho ! Signora Bernardini,—so it appears that there are, as the preachers say, consolations under every misfortune, if one can but find them out."

" Where ?" said Ignatius. " I see no one under the turret."

" So, he has vanished !" said the Marquis, rising in his stirrups, " no doubt put to flight by our approach. Surely, mon père, the first thing you will do will be to have a diligent search made after this ubiquitous personage."

" Pardon me, Monsieur le Marquis, the first thing that I must do, according to her Majesty's commands, is to see you comfortably lodged in the western tower; after which, this fresh September morning and a three leagues' ride have given me such an appetite, that I must crave your hospitality to introduce me, without

loss of time, to the contents of your buttery, about which, considering your long absence, I shall not be critical,—in short, a manchet and a venison steak, launched on a stream of Rhenish, and christened with a flask of Malvoisie, will suffice.”

“ Humph ! I wish, instead of the lands and signiory of Quillac, I had only been born to a monk’s patrimony,” said the Marquis.

“ And what may that be, par excellence ? ” asked Ignatius.

“ An insatiable appetite, unquenchable thirst, and the right of calling all those who are not old enough to be their brothers and sisters, daughters and sons.”

“ Well, brother, ‘tis not so bad after all, you’ll allow, pour tout potage ? ”

While the word brother, which the Jesuit had spitefully substituted for that of son, was still sticking in the Marquis’s throat, they arrived at the moat : the herald of the guard blew a loud blast from his trumpet, which was immediately answered from the warder of the castle, and the next moment the drawbridge was lowered,—and, while the soldiers were

crossing it, a crimson flag, with the Quillac arms embroidered in purple and gold, was planted on the battlements.

“Remember, I will give you the keys, so not a word about the royal warrant,” said the poor Marquis, trying to put on a careless smile; but the muscles of his face seemed to be labouring under a sudden rust, such difficulty had he in accomplishing it. True to his word, no sooner had he alighted at the castle gates, where all his retainers were drawn up to receive their lord, than returning their salutations with an economical bow, he walked up to Berger, the venerable seneschal, with an air of great dignity, and said, in a loud and commanding voice, “Good Berger, your keys:—’tis well!” added he, taking them, and placing them in the hands of the Jesuit; after which he continued, “Attend well to the instructions I am about to give you: it is my pleasure to remain in perfect and absolute seclusion within this castle,—nay, within the western tower of this castle, for one entire year, dating from this day, without any reference whatever to the new calendar; and as I peremptorily insist upon not having my pri-

vacy for that period disturbed, which could not be the case if the female, who at present occupies the western tower, remained an inmate of the castle, I will myself deliver her into the hands of this holy father, who has my orders to convey her hence to-morrow, by sunrise, under the escort of these brave Swiss, whom their Majesties, ever anxious for my safety, provided me with, as a guard of honour, on my return to Quillac. For the rest, you, Berger, and the knaves under you, will in all things obey this reverend father, while he remains, as if he were your master,—such is my pleasure."

"So be it, my gracious lord; but I fear me such close confinement may injure your noble health——"

"Confinement is an ugly word, Berger, for confinement implies compulsion; but retirement, which is what I am about to indulge in, is voluntary!"

Ignatius could not help smiling at the turn the Marquis had given to his imprisonment, especially as the latter now took his arm in a patronising manner, as if he intended himself to do the honours in showing the Jesuit the

castle, as he again turned to the seneschal, and said, “ See that my brave guard have a sample of the hospitality of Quillac, and that the board in the great hall groan with a suitable breakfast for our worthy friend here,—bearing in mind that there is a wide difference in the appetite of a helmet and a hood.” While the Marquis was giving this last direction, and his foot was on the first step of the stairs, a burly butler, who had been whispering a youth, who had a strong family likeness both to a weasel and a skewer, now pushed the latter forward with such an impetus, that he nearly fell flat before the Marquis, had not the rebound of a concussion against the balustrade given him an additional spin, which caused him to regain his equilibrium : “ What wouldest thou, varlet ? Speak ! ” said the Marquis.

“ So please you, Monsieur le Marquis, we are all so glad you are come back, for we are half starved : Fretin, the cook, gives us nothing but radishes and cheese for supper,” stammered the youth, transferring his cap from one hand to the other, and maltreating the floor by sundry kicks of his right foot as he spoke.

"Send the knave hither," thundered the Marquis: when accordingly Fretin was pushed forward (trembling like an aspen leaf) by those victims of his economy, his delighted fellow servants. "How is this, sirrah! is it true what Guenillon says, that you give the servants radishes and cheese for supper?"

"Monsieur le Marquis knows," commenced the cook, darting a look of ineffable contempt at the complainant, "qu'un Guenillon est toujours un Guenillon."

"Is it true, varlet?" interrupted the Marquis.

"Ye—ye—yes, but—" stammered the cook.

"Then, mind, sir, for the future," rejoined the Marquis, making a solemn pause between each word to give them more effect, while the hungry menials awaited breathlessly his generous mandate for redressing their wrongs, "mind, sir, for the future this does not happen, but that one night you give them cheese, and another night radishes."

The dead silence that followed this speech, was succeeded by a unanimous groan, as soon as they thought the Marquis was out of hearing (and in those dark and unenlightened times

there were no eaves-droppers among these poor vassals to report their disloyalty to their master), while Monsieur Fretin, the cook, stepped briskly up and paid Guenillon a handsome compliment upon the success of his complaint.

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! I do not think that my privacy will be interrupted and disturbed by any more of their grievances,” said the Marquis, on his way to the western tower : “ it was a peculiar feature in my diplomacy, and I strongly recommend it to all future rulers whatever, whether monarchs, ministers, ambassadors, governors, or jailers, whenever complaints are made by those under them, to redress the grievance by adding to it ; for this line of conduct invariably puts a stop to all future applications, and secures the repose and leisure of those in high places, which, of course, is what is meant by good government and a proper order of things.”

“ Hush ! listen,” said the Jesuit, when they had reached the door of the western tower, “ some one is singing.”

“ And yet they say caged nightingales never sing,” said the Marquis, “ but this one sings as

sweetly as if she were in a bower of roses. Let us listen, and perhaps this song may give us the clue to the silent knight in the polished armour."

As they listened they caught the following words.

" Oh ! for those by-gone days, when heart
As well as years was young,
And love still played a seraph's part,
And o'er life's fountain hung.

" When smiles *were* smiles, and tears were few,
And friends were what they seem'd,
And coming years a halo threw,
Of all that life had dreamed.

" When mirth was but joy's lesser part,
Its surface and its glow,
While the deep stream within the heart,
Pursued its equal flow.

" But now life's jaded race is run,
And dreary were its goal,
Had we not God's unsetting sun,
The spirit's day, the soul !"

" Nay, 'tis no love ditty after all," said the Marquis ; " however, it is some time since she has seen me ; and I remark, that whenever women meet with a disappointment of the heart, they instantly begin to think about their

soul, in the hope, no doubt, that that will fare better."

Ignatius tried all the keys till he found the one belonging to this chamber door, which he opened accordingly. Arianna was sitting near the window, but the moment she perceived the Jesuit she ran towards him with an exclamation of joy—while the Marquis stood behind him making pantomimic declarations of love, which nevertheless did not reach the person they were addressed to, who was too intent upon hearing and reciting the events of the last year, to even notice that there was a third person present. Arianna finished her narration by stating, that for the last four months she had been free from the presence and importunities of Vittorio Cappello, but that, on the other hand, the rigour and impertinences of Ferrai had increased to an almost intolerable degree.

"Never mind, daughter, the day of reckoning has arrived,—*your* sufferings are at an end; but for that precious specimen of universal rascality, Master Ferrai, I promise him that he shall soon have heavier chains upon his

hands than the fairy shackles that he used to forge at Venice. "Farewell, Marquis," added Ignatius, leading Arianna from the room, "I now leave you in your chamber 'to commune with your own heart, and be still.' "

"But still you leave me, and that is the worst part of it," muttered the disconsolate Marquis, as the Jesuit turned the key in the door, and the echos fell like so many dismal predictions on his ear.

The next morning—beneath a brilliant, but not very warm sun—might be seen, in front of the Château de Quillac, dashing the diamond dew-drops from the emerald glades of the pleasaunce with the mere echoes of their horses' hoofs, as they rung on the hard gravel, the Queen's guard;—their horses and armour equally bright, and both men and horses all the better for a twenty-four hours' rest. In the very centre of the two hundred Swiss, they forming a perfect wall on each side of him, rode Ferrai, hand-cuffed and manacled, so that any attempt at escape was rendered impossible. Next to the Jesuit was Arianna, on a beautiful milk-white palfrey, of Arabian lineage, with

housings of azure velvet, flowered with silver, a collar of silver bells, and a silver lily on its forehead, from which protruded a blue aigrette; while in the centre of the feathers was a beautiful blush rose (a rarity at that season), sheltered from the too harsh breath of autumn, by having a paper round it, on which was written—‘Pour elle qui te ressemble.’

Though gallantry was by no means an unheard-of qualification among the monks of those times, above all, among the disciples of Loyola, yet the timid and delicate tints of the flower, and above all its soft and concentual fragrance (which seemed the result of a sigh having intervened between it and the common air), appeared to plead eloquently its own and its donor’s cause, and assure Arianna it was not the gift of the Jesuit. Too right-minded to continue to love one so utterly unworthy as Vittorio Cappello, and too pure not to resent his conduct to her individually, she had long banished him from her thoughts; but although the image was broken to which her first devotions had been paid, she would have deemed it profanation to have placed another idol on the

same shrine. The temple had been desecrated—the worship had ceased—and her heart had become a wilderness—where the wanderings of her spirit every day grew more faint and weary; but there is no wilderness which has such mysterious resources as that of the heart: for often when we have resigned all hope, and think that life must terminate in that dark desert of seared feelings, love once more looks from heaven, and feeds us with “angels’ food.”

As Arianna took the rose and praised its beauty, she involuntarily turned round, as if in search of the person to whom her thanks were due. On her left hand rode the knight who had excited the curiosity of the Marquis de Millepropos at the Chante Poulet. He appeared to be on perfect terms with the Jesuit, which confirmed her in the idea that he was an officer—the commander, most likely, of the guard,—and that the rose and its motto were nothing more than a common-place act of gallantry. But as they pursued their route to Honfleur, his attentions were too tender, too engaging, and yet too unobtrusive, to be classed under that head either; for he seemed as one

who, though quite capable of the devotion of a sacrifice, was determined not to incur the humiliation of a defeat. But Florence is a long way from Normandy, and as this unknown knight was to perform the whole of the journey beside Arianna, and consequently did all that he could to protract it, we must be under the necessity of leaving them, in order to arrive there before them ; merely remarking that he took up all his positions so well, that before they embarked at Honfleur, Arianna had first wondered why he had not, and then wished that he had, raised his vizard.

CHAPTER VII.

Angélique—“Crois-tu qu'il m'aime autant qu'il me le dit ?

Toinette.—“Hé ! hé ! les choses-là, parfois sont un peu sujettes à caution. Les grimaces d'amour ressemblent fort à la vérité ; et j'ai vu de grands comédiens là-dessus.”

LE MALADE IMAGINAIRE.

———“Profite de l'occasion pour apprendre l'histoire de ton ordre : il est de première force sur tous les sujets qui ne servent à rien.”—CHARLES DE BERNARD.

SINCE we were last at Florence, three deaths had occurred, that of Cosimo Primo (but being dead let him rest in peace, which, like many others, he never could do while living), and those of the elder Bonaventuri and the Signor Sylvestro. But it is with the results of the latter's demise that we have to do.

Great as is the variety among flowers, there is a still greater diversity among *weeds*; I mean those worn by widows. Some indulge in a violent and reprehensible intensity of grief, in

donning them, and bury their hearts in the tombs of their husbands ; others imitate, and even surpass, Brutus's philosophic bearing at the loss of his Portia ; while a few rare exceptions, with all the originality of genius, strike out a new plan for evincing resignation economically, and mourning profitably, and to this class belonged the Signora Sylvestro. No sooner had her sposo departed for the other world, where she made sure he enjoyed every happiness (if it were only from the circumstance of having left her behind, for men seldom take their wives when they have anything very delightful in view) ; no sooner then was he no more, than the sight of the most trifling article of wearing apparel belonging to the dear departed became insupportable to her ; it may therefore be concluded that she gave them away ? No such thing ; she set too great a value on them for that, and setting a value *on* them, determined to get the uttermost value *for* them ; so sending for her prime minister, Herr Schnits, she deputed him to dispose of them among the Israelites, who, though they give nothing for nothing, always give something for whatever

they get. Nay, her irritability of memory even extended itself to her own wardrobe, which would be useless to her during her mourning, and probably might be out of fashion before she doffed it. She, therefore, wisely determined upon expediting her sposo's passage across the Styx by an additional sale ; and so like Joseph's, her party-coloured gear was also sold, but not to the Egyptians.

Yet ever amiably punctilious as to all the decorums of life, even in the midst of these heart-rending arrangements occasioned by death, the signora Sylvestro did not forget, that one benevolent chirurgeon had sat up with her late spouse, night after night, and had given his time and his skill to the sufferer, for months, without getting anything but cold during the wet winter evenings. Now, knowing that he would not receive anything, and that nothing could repay his services, she determined that nothing should do so ; but he had a wife, and some memento of gratitude might be acceptable to her.

The signora Sylvestro had not been in India without possessing gold ornaments and precious stones in abundance ; but no doubt they had

been the gifts of her *dear* husband, or else reminded her of happier times, ere her hair had began to go, and her wrinkles to come,—so with those she could not part; but among the different garments she had subjected to the Mosaic law was an ancient Bangalore scarf, between a senna and a prune colour, which from much wear, had here and there derived some of the ruddy hues of her own neck, besides sundry little perforations visible when held up to the light. No wonder, then, that the Israelite rejected this scarf; and Herr Schnits was, after long and fruitless haggling, obliged to bring it back to its original owner, who immediately sat down and dispatched it to the doctor's wife, accompanied by a note which might have served, from its grandiloquent style, as the herald to a present of a casket of jewels; but, strange to say, the signora of '*il dottore*,' ashamed no doubt of having received so costly a remuneration for her sposo's services, never once wore it, though she evinced her gratitude by bestowing her hospitality on the bercaved widow.

It was, therefore, about a week after her

husband's burial that the signora Sylvestro, while discussing the funeral baked meats at the doctor's table, got into such a violent hurricane of indignation at hearing of the indelicacy and want of feeling of two young girls, who had actually been seen in the Prato a fortnight after they had heard of the death of a brother, whom they had not seen for ten years, that had not the doctor, with much skill and promptness, poured her out a large beaker of unadulterated Marsala, she would in all probability have fallen into a fit : what rendered the conduct of these signorini doubly unpardonable was, that they were not only young and pretty, but utterly incapable of appreciating the goodness of Providence ; for they got proposals without taking the slightest trouble to do so, and valued them so little, when they did get them, that they had not hitherto accepted any of them ; a species of ingratitude perfectly incomprehensible to the signora Sylvestro, who was always on the look out for return lovers. And sometimes when she thought that she had succeeded in stopping one, she would get up a sort of one-sided flirtation with some utterly uncon-

scious youth, in the hope of piquing the aforesaid return into more expeditious advances;—heretofore without any fatal results.

But what will not patience and perseverance accomplish? About four months after “poor dear Sylvestro’s” death (for such she had always called him even to his most successful rivals, and still called him to his most probable successors), the fag-end of a regiment—that is to say, a commissary—she had known in India, after having for many years burnt, in the hot east, came to marry in the sweet south, for now his circumstances enabled him to contemplate the bonds of Hymen; that is, he had accumulated a large stomach, a red nose, and innumerable debts. The two former were perfectly visible to the naked eye, but the latter he studiously concealed from the Signora Sylvestro, into whose ears he poured, instead, a thousand professions of unalterable and desperate love! And, sooth to say, his circumstances were sufficiently desperate to render his passion an unhappy one, and warrant his confounding the one with the other.

It was this amiable object (whose baptismal

appellation was Thomas, but who, for the euphonious purposes of love-making, she had anabaptized Lorenzo), that first succeeded in drying her tears, or, to speak more correctly, he was the first whom she had succeeded in making understand that to console the widow was a Christian virtue. From all public amusements the signora Sylvestro had hitherto abstained (beyond a daily walk in the Boboli, when she trusted to accident to bring her in contact with the Grand Duke, and to awaken in him a better taste than that which induced him to prefer Bianca Cappello); but at length arrived a day when all Florence were flocking to the Giardino Buccellai, to see the combat ‘à mort’ between the Gonfaloniere and Vittorio Cappello. Now the signora (without even knowing what the quarrel was about) strongly advocated Martin Bernardini’s cause, merely from the circumstance of Count Cappello being Bianca’s brother; she therefore generously resolved to follow the example of the rest of the world, and repair to the Giardino Buccellai, and in case the Gonfaloniere’s lance did not do its errand with his foe, assist the onslaught

with the artillery of her eyes. She was sitting, waiting for her Thomas, or Lorenzo, Herr Schnits and his wife, and comparing herself in her own mind to the allegorical figures of Night (who is always represented as a young and beautiful female, clothed in darkness), when a gentle knock came to the sitting-room door.

“Come in,” said the Signora Sylvestro, who, feeling sure it was Thomas,—that is to say, Lorenzo, immediately fell into one of those interesting locomotive paroxysms, between a wriggle and a flutter, for which she was so celebrated; but after wasting the green glories of her eyes, for full three minutes, on the ground, she raised them only to meet those of Madame Schnits, who shone out in all the gyratory splendour of one of the signora’s own ‘*ci-devant*’ fardingales.

“Herr Schnits,” said the lady, “will be here in a few minutes; he is only gone to the Via del Sole, to call for the signor Lorenzo.”

The signora Sylvestro, who had been dying for the last month (that is ever since the day after that Thomas had discovered her abode at Florence), to announce her intended marriage

to Madame Schnits, in order that that lady might no longer have any pretext for not bantering her on the happy event,—was delighted at the opportunity which had thus unexpectedly arisen for doing so: accordingly, determined to avail herself of it, she began in a low simpering whisper, though they were perfectly alone, “ My dear Madame Schnits, I fear you must have perceived the dreadful state poor Lorenzo is in about me ? I have preached—I have begged—I have remonstrated with him to wait a few months—only a few months—longer, —but you know there is no getting a man in love to listen to reason ! Now what I want is your opinion—your advice ; for poor dear Sylvestro was so much older than me, that I feel like a per-r-r-fect baby now that I have to act for myself. What I dread is, Lorenzo’s being hurried away by a sudden and uncontrollable passion ; and that it is not that never-changing, undying love, that will continue to our old age ; do you think it is ? ”

Madame Schnit’s private opinion was, that having already reached a very tough and respectable age on both sides, there was nothing

to be apprehended on that score ; but she diplomatically answered, with a shrug of her shoulders, “ Alas ! my dear signora, you know men are such deceivers ; and the falsehoods of love are so like truth, that it is scarcely possible to distinguish one from the other ; but consult my husband, he has wonderful penetration in these matters.”

Just as the signora was about to reply, somewhat disappointed that her friend had not recommended any salutary cautions to her inexperienced youth, the door opened, and Lorenzo and Herr Schnits made their appearance, the former holding a floral offering for his inamorata ; and the latter, who looked, if possible, more pompous than usual, held his right hand at arm’s length, while he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon a small impalpable atom that reposed upon his thumb nail,—and which turned out to be a defunct flea ;

“ Here is a curious phenomenon of Nature !” said Herr Schnits, in his peculiarly guttural, solemn, and long-drawn-out German accent ; “ which I came into possession of in rather a singular way—but that I will describe to you another

day ; but I was going to observe that, from the tortuous appearance of this flea's left leg, I have every reason to suppose that it died in the act of sneezing : but, as I intend to write an *anagogical* treatise, in two volumes, quarto, for the Entomological school, on this most interesting and useful subject, with a curious episode about the *anhydrous* properties of the flea, I will not now detain you from the Giardino Buccellai, as I know ladies prefer trifling amusements to the higher branches of knowledge and scientific pursuits ! ”

With this compliment to the sex, and a conscious air of masculine superiority, Herr Schnits offered his arm to the signora Sylvestro. Here Lorenzo interfered ; but the signora declared, with an infantine giggle, and what would have been a coquettish shake of the head in a young and pretty woman, that she would walk with Herr Schnits, as she had something of great importance to say to him. Accordingly, no sooner had they turned the corner of the Duomo—Lorenzo and Madame Schnits walking before them—than the Signora Sylvestro, with a considerable reinforcement of wriggling and

simpering,—for she was now not only talking to a man, but in the street where there were many men,—propounded the same question, touching the durability and reality of Lorenzo's love, to Herr Schnits, that she had previously done to his wife ; but instead of answering her immediately, the entomologist came to a dead pause, and looking his companion full in the face for about three minutes, said, raising the forefinger of his right hand prophetically :

“Stop ! these things require great caution, and cannot be decided upon hastily. I will devote myself to watching Lorenzo narrowly and attentively for a year, or a year and a half, and then I will let you know the result.”

“Heavens !” almost screamed the signora Sylvestro, “I cannot wait,—that is, I mean Lorenzo will never be content to wait,—all that time.”

“No !” said Herr Schnits ; “then I should strongly advise you not to think of uniting yourself to such a rash and impatient character.”

There was something in the epithets of *rash* and *impatient*, that belonged by right divine

so peculiarly to youth, that they charmed the signora Sylvestro into an involuntary pressure of Herr Schnits' arm ; but, like the ancients (who held round forms sacred, and therefore made both their altars and their tables of that shape), she cast a look of devotion towards the rotund figure of the commissary, as it rolled on before her.

“Oh!” recommenced the signora Sylvestro.—

“ Ah !” responded Herr Schnits ; which, it must be acknowledged, was a sufficiently logical reply to the first interjection.

“ — You know not what it is at my time of life to be alone in the world,”—and the signora applied her handkerchief to her eyes, no doubt to exclude so frightful a prospect.

“ I quite understand,” said Herr Schnits,—with that leaden solidity of intellect which arrives at the comprehension of that which is before its eyes, without ever even hazarding a surmise relative to the existence of that which is not self-evident,—“ I quite understand that, being somewhat advanced in years, you — ”

Here the signora gave a faint, but sharp

cry, and hastily removed her arm from that of Herr Schnits.

"What is the matter? Have you been stung?"

"No," said the signora, her face suddenly assuming the hue of a well-boiled lobster, "but I believe the street is not a fitting place for the discussion of such delicate subjects."

"I quite agree with you," said Herr Schnits. All entomologist though he was, he had not the remotest knowledge of the physiology of the very insignificant insect that now fluttered beside him; neither was he one of those garrulous companions who charge themselves with all the expenditure of conversation; consequently as the signora did not open her lips after her last remark, they arrived at the 'Giardino Buccellai' in solemn silence, which was only broken by an exclamation of disappointment on the part of the Sylvestro at seeing all the people coming away, and hearing that the combat had terminated ten minutes before, by Count Cappello's having been unhorsed, badly wounded, and conveyed by order

of the Grand Duke to the Pitti. Rumour also added, that the Gonfaloniere had wanted to have had a regular tournament ; but since the fatal one which had terminated in the death of Henry the Second of France, all the European crowned heads had combined to abolish those dangerous exhibitions : therefore to this request of Martin Bernardini, Francesco de Medici remained inexorable ; not the less so, perhaps, from the circumstance of the Gonfaloniere's adversary being Bianca's brother.

"What on earth are the crowd looking at, as the combat is over?" said the commissary.

"It is a statue," replied Herr Schnits, "that they are going to erect of the Grand Duke, and it is not yet raised."

"It cannot be finished," said a man in the crowd, "for though in full armour, it has no gauntlets."

"Bah ! the artist knew very well what he was about, and saw that there was no need of gloves, when his hands are always in our pockets," replied his companion.

"Ha ! ha ! ha ! by Mercury, thou art right."

Just as the signora Sylvestro was elbowing her way through the crowd, in no very amiable mood, at this disappointment, fermenting as it did Herr Schnits' ‘mal-apropos’ truism about her increasing years, a fat lady advanced, with a shining visage of a crimson hue. It appeared, by the “winks, and nods, and wreathed smiles” telegraphed between them, that she was an acquaintance of Lorenzo; and, had any doubt existed on the subject, it would have been ended by his introducing her to the Sylvestro as Signora Grossofiasco—a *particular* friend of his; after which he proposed their adjourning to a neighbouring ‘boschetto,’ where tables were spread with refreshments of divers kinds. This being agreed to, the commissary disdained the mere mortal beverages of Hippocras, Aleatico, Falernian, and Orvietto, and generously ordered liberal supplies of that sparkling folly called champagne, which has time out of mind had the honour of furnishing jesters for monarchs. During the collation, the circulation of glances and glasses was so commingled, that even the lynx-eye of love could not find any separate charge to bring against Lorenzo and

signora Grossofiasco ; but when the repast was ended, and they walked out together, Lorenzo merely kissing his adieux (via his hand) to the signora Sylvestro, and saying they should return,—she felt that while *they* were going further *she* was faring worse ! It was *too much* ! and she burst into tears.

But time ! time ! what can it not do ?—Aye, it can even dry a widow's tears. And when the shades of evening began to darken the ‘boschetto,’ and still *no Lorenzo returned*!—and, what was worse, *no Grossofiasco*!—then indeed did she find a sympathising friend in Herr Schnits; for though Lorenzo had nobly acted up to his former functions in the commissariat, it was very plain that he had no intention of performing those of adjutant : and the bill had to be paid ! and so Herr Schnits informed the Sylvestro. But *she* evidently thought it would be more *German* to the matter if he paid it ; which he at length did, with a profound sigh and a mental exclamation of—“I would not be an ornithologist for the world ! Thank heaven, ants and fleas have *no bills*!”

That night the signora Sylvestro perjured

herself, for she swore she should not live till morning ; but she did live, first, till another month, when,—“Oh perfidy! thy name is man!”—she heard the bells of San Gaetano ringing for the nuptials of the commissary and the rich signora Grossofiasco ;—and after this, she took quite another turn, and never even thought of dying (anything but her old Padusay silks) and lived on, unknown to herself, anticipating Madame de Maintenon’s assertion,* (with a difference); and finding great consolation in the idea, that she deserved all the lovers in the world, even though she could not get one !

* “ C'est toujours un grand bonheur de mériter tout, quand même on n'obtient rien.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“Cet abîme de fourberies, et de scélérité, n'est point de la connoissance du laboureur.”—MARIVAUX.

“Quid vota furentum,
Quid delubra juvant.”—ÆNEID, IV.

THE cannons were echoing through Florence, and the good people were seen walking through a festa in the sun, with their large cloaks about them, if men, and their large hats, if women, but with a slow and heavy walk in both cases, as if amusement was a thing which requires exertion of body and mind (which to a certain degree it does, especially of the latter), and, therefore, never entered into the comprehension of an Italian; here and there the shadow of a quiet smile might be seen darkening rather than illuminating some individual face, whose owner had succeeded in getting the best view of the Pallone players, or the pony

races without riders ; or better still, who had succeeded in swallowing an unpaid-for glass of lemonade, while the women, whether ‘ grandmas,’ citizens, or ‘ contadinas,’ seemed of the universal opinion, that eyes had been invented but for the one purpose,—of giving and receiving. Why then, as the people thronged the ever verdant gardens of the Boboli, and their shrill voices rose even above the hoarse thunders of the cannon—sat Joan of Austria—looking with aching eyes, and a still more aching heart, upon the crowd below ? and for the first time thinking the merry laugh of her little girls discordant, as they played about the room.

Bianca Cappello that morning had had a son, and the event was announced with even more than the usual honours of legitimacy ; for the Grand Duke had given orders, previous to the birth of this child, to have everything in readiness (in the event of its being a boy) for an immediate and splendid baptism in the Duomo, followed by a proclamation of its being the heir and successor of Francesco Primo, Grand Duke of Tuscany. There is a grief whose quiet

ravages are more deadly than the uprootings of the most violent sorrow ; just as the mountain torrent, though it devastates and sweeps away all before it for the time, even from the impetuous gushings of its troubled waters, sprays forth the verdure of a future spring ; but the withering and parching sirocco that passes over the desert, has no sigh of mercy in its deadly breath, but blasts for ever. And Joan had experienced too often the matrimonial sirocco of unkindness, injustice, and neglect, which so irrevocably sears a woman's heart, for its traces not to have found their way to her features ; always what those who loved her would have called placid, and what those who did not might have termed cold ; but it was only the slight frost of a somewhat late spring, which the first warm glow of sunshine would have dissolved, and unbound the pure deep current that flowed beneath. But life's sunshine was not for her, and the bud which might have expanded with kindness into so fair a blossom, being so prematurely nipped, presented nothing to a superficial observer, but a pale and sickly blight that cumbered the earth it could not embel-

lish ; and yet, wretched as Joan was, she was happy compared to her triumphant, and apparently joyous rival ; for the weight of sorrow, however great, is always light compared with that of sin, and the most envious or flattering and smooth-tongued courtiers of either sex, even while they hated, or adulated the roses that bloomed in Bianca's cheeks, would have hardly exchanged with her, to have had the thorns of those roses lacerate and rankle in their hearts as they did in hers.

The Grand Duchess looked from the windows with fixed, but tearless eyes, and she was silent, though not alone, as a fair young face (from which, however, the first girlish glow of youth had passed away), and a pair of deep blue, loving eyes, looked pityingly on hers, while a newly-appointed chamberlain, of gallant and handsome bearing, seemed, as he leaned with one elbow on the back of Joan's high-backed chair, to be incessantly on the watch for the rebound of some of the compassionate glances that these same loving blue eyes bestowed so lavishly on the Duchessa.

“ Don't stare so, it is very rude to stare at

people, as you are staring at Signora Bernadini, Count Vasi," said Beatrice, the eldest of the Duchess's little girls, unmercifully pulling the beautiful blue velvet cloak of Ernesto Vasi; for this young Venetian noble, the newly appointed chamberlain, and the unknown knight who had accompanied Arianna from the Château de Quillac to Florence, were one and the same person.

And we may as well confess the truth at once; this young man's honourable love did not fare the worse, because he had so secretly hoarded it as long as Arianna passed for the jeweller's daughter, whom, if he thought too humble to marry, he also thought too good to ruin, and too gentle to insult. All this was gratefully, oh how gratefully remembered by the beautiful object of his unceasing adoration, so that every day she felt more happy in his presence, and less happy out of it, though she was not herself quite aware of this fact; nevertheless Arianna had doubts whether she ever would marry; and when ladies have these doubts, lovers, even as constant and devoted as Ernesto Vasi, if any such there be (I myself

believe, though Buffon is silent on the subject, that the race is extinct); but if there be, they must wait patiently, or if that is not possible, impatiently, their liege lady's will and pleasure.

Joan took the little Beatrice on her lap, and chided her with a kiss to heal the reproof for her remark upon the chamberlain; when, child-like, the little girl immediately flew off to another mal-apropos subject, and while she patted her mother's pale cheek, said—

“ But why don't I see my brother, the new Archduke, that all the cannons are firing for? I do so like to have a brother !”

Joan burst into tears as she put the child down, and Arianna led both the children from the room, and then returned to mingle her tears with those of the Duchess; and which were the most bitter it would have been hard to decide. Arianna wept for the fall and the errors of one whom she had much loved, and Joan wept because she had never been loved. Let the chemistry of metaphysics decide which void is the most aching,—that which has never been filled, except by its own yearnings to be so,—or that which

having been filled to overflowing, is drained for ever?

But the tears of women must be infinitely lighter than the air they breathe, since they weigh so little in the scale of creation, as never to turn the beam even a hair's breadth on their side, however abundant they may be. So we will leave the Duchess and Arianna to their woman's fate, of sorrowing unheeded and alone, while we follow into their privacy two actors in our busy scenes, who were not much more rejoiced at the birth of the Archduke than those we have just quitted.

In the great gallery of the Palazzo Vecchio, whose now faded frescos were then vivid and fresh from the master-hand of Vasari, walked the Cardinal de Medici and the Gonfaloniere; the former with his hands behind his back, his eyes bent on the ground, and his nether lip sharply bitten, while Martin Bernardini, who was in his state armour of bright silver, damascined with a rich chasing of gold, walked beside him, with folded arms, it is true, but with his head thrown back, and a calm yet somewhat

ironical smile flitting round his mouth, like a man sure of his points, whatever cards turned up. A pause had ensued in their conversation, which the Gonfaloniere was the first to break.

“ What is to be feared, your eminence, is, that the Grand Duke’s infatuation, after the detestable event of this morning, may lead him to sue for a divorce, and having managed to get Philip of Spain, Catherine de Medici, and Lainez, the general of the Jesuits, on his side, with that subtle devil, Ignatius Dragoni (whose tone to and about the Bianca is most miraculously changed since his return from France), the Pope may be induced to grant it.”

“ Gonfaloniere,” said the Cardinal, suddenly stopping and looking his companion sternly in the face, “ it is the Pope’s privilege to pardon sin, but not to propagate it. He would never grant such a divorce. Did his predecessor, Paul, grant a divorce to Henry the Eighth of England ?”

“ No ; but what was the consequence ?”

“ His excommunication !” thundered the Cardinal.

" His secession from the Church of Rome," replied the Gonfaloniere calmly, lowering his voice.

The Cardinal knit his brows, but remained silent.

" The fact is," resumed Martin Bernardini, " his Holiness, what with piety and politics, is situated much between the same sort of perpetual dilemmas as poor Father Clement, the Catholic bishop of the African island of Lampedusa, and is therefore often obliged to steer clear of his surrounding embarrassments by a similar impartiality of conduct. Lampedusa being a small island in the Mediterranean, between Tunis and Malta, where there is one chapel dedicated to the Madonna and another to Mahomet,—Father Clement, whenever a Christian vessel hove in sight, instantly lit a lamp before the Virgin ; but no sooner was the pennant of a Turkish ship visible, than he lost no time in illuminating the Mohammedan temple, and thus pleased all parties and secured his own prerogatives."

The Cardinal, little relishing this side-thrust at the Church, would not give it the importance

of a defence, but merely said, in reply to the original question of divorce,

“ Were my brother mad enough to attempt such a thing, and the Holy See were not in existence, there is still the same Pregadi, who erased the name of Bianca Cappello from the roll of San Marco, to carry out its just resentment.”

“ True, there is still the same Pregadi,” rejoined the Gonfaloniere, “ but I would wager the city standard to a cobweb, that that same Pregadi,—aye, by San Stefano! and the senate and nobles to boot, who, with such proper indignation, disinherited the wife of Pietro Bonaventuri from being a daughter of San Marco,—would, with most loyal alacrity be ready to do homage to the Grand Duchess of Tuscany, and reinstate her in all the paternal honours of their saint.”

“ You think, then,” said the Cardinal somewhat acrimoniously; “ that whatever feather the wind blows uppermost, that should men stick in their caps and clamour for?”

“ I do not think they should,—but I know they do,” replied the Gonfaloniere; “ but your

eminence's shaft aims not at me ; for I refused all the Grand Duke's overtures ; resisted all my newly-found niece's tears and entreaties, even to see the favourite, who was her early friend and benefactor ; and, despite both, placed her about the person of the Duchess."

"But the Arch-Duke Antonio was not then born," said the Cardinal, with a sneer that might have roused a less consummate actor than Martin Bernardini into some slight show of resentment ; but he merely continued, with an additional reinforcement of affected 'bon-hommie.'

"True ; but setting aside all temper, which invariably tilts one out of one's vantage ground ; and all personal interest, which as invariably warps the judgment, and clouds the intellect ; we cannot disguise from ourselves, however disagreeable it may be, the fact of Vittorio Cappello's hourly increasing sway over the Grand Duke ;—the most startling and miraculous proof of which is, that his insolence has actually made Bonaventuri popular ! and it is but natural to suppose, that the same pride

which caused Cappello to visit his sister's 'més-alliance' with such vengeance, will prompt him to aim at almost impossibilities for her aggrandizement ; besides which, he owes my niece and me a considerable grudge for rejecting his alliance, after all the insults he had previously offered her : this, I fancy, rankles in him far more than the wound (though a pretty deep one) that I inflicted on him in the Buccellai, six months ago ; consequently, he naturally includes your eminence's interests, which I may call our party, in his hatred and opposition. But the chief danger is from the favourite herself : for it is not our actions, however bad, that injure us in this world, so much as our conduct after them ;—and Bianca, in one respect, resembles her friend Titian,—for her designs, even when most faulty, are so exquisite in their tone, and so happy in their colouring, that they take admiration by storm, and disarm criticism."

"So it appears," said the Cardinal, tartly ;
"when the Gonfaloniere so lauds her."

"I laud her not," replied Martin Bernardini;

"on the contrary, every day I am more and more inclined to agree with Aristotle, that woman is a beautiful error of creation."

"'Sdeath!" cried the Cardinal, taking off his hat and chafing his temples; "and Aristotle might have added that elder brothers were a frightful mistake."

"True," rejoined the Gonfalonfere, as his keen bright eye seemed to pierce into the uttermost depths of the Cardinal's soul; "true, did not *death* sometimes make a few necessary *errata*."

"Nay," said the Cardinal, as if afraid of compromising himself even to himself; "I spoke not as a kinsman; 'twas of the welfare of the state I thought. But for Francesco! heaven and our race be praised, his feelings are too short, for his life not to be long."

Here a pause of some seconds ensued.

"You understand," resumed the Cardinal, "'twas of the welfare of the state I spoke?"

"Aye, mine ears were sponsors to your eminence's patriotism: whose firm resolve, and high intent, I do believe, would deem no sacrifice too great to insure the country's wel-

fare. And," added Martin Bernardini, after a short pause, during which he bent his eye on the Cardinal, with the fascination of a rattle-snake ; " there are ways which that welfare might be achieved, if——"

But here the doors opened, and a page announced the cardinal's coach, and the Gonfaloniere's horses, to be in readiness, to convey them to the Duomo, for the ceremony of the Archduke's baptism.

" If it is for the good of the state," said the Cardinal, solemnly, as soon as they were again alone ; " that I should, by assisting at, legitimise this ceremony, God knows ! I cannot make a greater sacrifice."

" But *this* sacrifice," replied his wily companion, " from your Eminence's rank in the Church, and position as heir presumptive to the Grand Duchy, is *compulsory* ; and it is only *free-will* offerings that are salutary."

The Cardinal, who mistook the drift of this speech, or rather who was not bad enough to apprehend it, replied, with ironical warmth—
" Such, for instance, as *the Gonfaloniere's*

*homage will no doubt be, ere this hour expire,
to the heir apparent !”*

“ Oh, in that matter,” said Martin Bernardini, with more than his usual coolness, as he took his golden and richly-jewelled helmet from off a neighbouring table, placed it with both hands leisurely on his head, and then shook its snow-white plumes,—“ in that matter I am but a tyro ; so *my oaths of allegiance will only be the temporal shadows of your Eminence’s spiritual aspirations* for the young Prince’s *long life and prosperous reign !”*

It was no part of the Cardinal’s policy to quarrel with the Gonfaloniere,—and, however we may conceal it from others, we have always *within* a just plummet whereby to measure our own depth,—and Ferdinando de Medici *felt* that he was no match for Martin Bernardini ; so linking his arm within that of the latter, he said, with a smile, “ Come, let not the birth of this brat be the signal of *our dissolution*,—there is no use in separating body and soul. So e’en let your allegiance and my benedictions travel together to the Duomo, and consecrate the Archduke.”

“Our fates are settled for us the day we are born!” said the Gonfaloniere, as they descended the stairs. “But,” added he, in a whisper, “that which *begins* with our birth seldom accompanies us to the end of our days.”

It was impossible to tell which was the most dense,—the crowd that filled, or the flowers that strewed, the streets of Florence, as processions of different religious orders, from the white Franciscans down to the barefooted, brown-clad, partially shorn brothers of St. Joseph, proceeded to the Duomo, flinging incense, and chanting the ‘*Omnis gentes plaudite.*’ The church was filled with spectators, and hung with cloth of gold. The steps of the altar were covered with violet velvet, embroidered in golden lilies; while the chains of the golden incense burners were alternate links of diamonds and sapphires; so that as the sacristans and choristers flung them to and fro, they appeared to be scattering sunbeams about the altar; on either side of which was ranged the whole court, and the Grand Duke, in his robes of state. The mass was then sung; after which the bishop, bearing in his arms the infant

Archduke, passed on, followed by the whole court, into San Giovanni, or the Baptistery, and the cortège moved up the aisle through the giant guard of granite columns, till they came before the altar, from which the figure of St. John, amid all the angels that were bearing him to heaven, appeared to look down upon the font placed beneath. This font was of lapis-lazuli, ornamented with bassi-relievi, by Giovanni dell' Opera. The bishop held the child ; but it devolved upon the Cardinal de Medici to pronounce the baptismal rites ; and although he sprinkled the holy water, it must be owned, not too gently on the infant's face, it uttered no sound,—a circumstance which was highly satisfactory both to the Cardinal and the Bishop ; but many female antiquities present shrugged their shoulders and pronounced it a bad omen,—for the wise in such matters have a theory (and it is by no means without a semblance of probability), that as there is so much cause for tears in this world, children who shed none at their christening do not live long. No sooner was the ceremony over, than all the nobles knelt to take their oaths of

allegiance to the newly inaugurated heir-apparent. After which, they retraced their steps down the aisle, and with a burst of military music, those then brightly gilt and exquisitely wrought bronze doors of Ghiberti's, which Michael Angelo pronounced worthy of being the gates of paradise, flew open, and the procession (even those members of it who, like the Cardinal and Gonfaloniere, had not come on foot), walked back to the Pitti under the awning of gorgeous state canopies.

"It would be a matter of curious speculation," said the Cardinal de Medici to Martin Bernardini, as they walked side by side in the procession, while the chanting of the monks in some manner rendered their conversation confidential, "to guess at what the difference of destiny would be to Tuscany, and to the individual himself, had this child been the son of Joan of Austria, instead of 'la detestabile' Bianca!"

To which query the Gonfaloniere, who always assumed a plethora of pious decorum in public, merely replied, turning up his eyes,

"It would indeed ! but the ways of heaven
are——"

"Inscrutable—are they not, most noble Gonfaloniere ?" said, or rather shrieked, an old woman, of hideous and excited aspect, as she forced her way through the crowd, thrusting her skinny clenched hand almost in Martin Bernardini's face ; and disappearing as suddenly as she had appeared, with a frightfully wild and hollow laugh.

"Let the hag be seized !" cried the Gonfaloniere, turning deadly pale, and involuntarily half drawing his sword ; "'tis Giovannina Neri, the witch."

But all research was vain : the old woman could nowhere be found.

"Not a very bewitching object either," said Vittorio Cappello, sneeringly, as he looked back over his shoulder at Martin Bernardini, with all the newly-acquired insolence of manner which the ceremony of the morning had so tended to increase ; "yet I wonder too, signor Gonfaloniere, that a man of your quality should dabble in sorcery, and have recourse to witches!"

"At all events," replied the Gonfaloniere, who was never more than for half a second, by any circumstance, however appalling or unexpected, betrayed into an outward display of his inward feelings,—"no one can be surprised that Count Cappello, after the ceremony we have just had the *honour* of assisting at, should prefer the *natural* course of events!"

CHAPTER IX.

"De l'homme du monde le plus impérieux, une femme peut faire tout ce qu'il lui plaira, pourvu qu'elle ait beaucoup d'esprit, assez de beauté, et *peu d'amour*."—FONTENELLE.

THE people groaned under innumerable abuses, and the state tottered under the overwhelming weight of accumulating debt ; but the court of Francesco de Medici was as brilliant and light as if the former had not had a single oppression to complain of, and the latter had not owed a doit. Masque succeeded masque, and 'festa' followed 'festa.' Bianca, more powerful than ever since the proclamation of the Archduke Antonio,—but, nevertheless, more than ever unable to bear the reproaches of her own conscience,—endeavoured, if she could not silence them, at all events to drown them in a continual whirlpool of dissipation :—for it is one of the unrepealable laws of nature, that, in

order to be happy, we must be on good terms with those with whom we live: and if we have that within which makes life insupportable to us, we will as naturally try to fly from ourselves as from other tormentors. But there is this unfortunate difference between the two sources of affliction,—from others we may escape, but from ourselves we cannot! Is anything, therefore, in this world, worth our entailing on our existence the heavy mortgage of a bad conscience? I think not: but this is evidently the opinion of the minority.

Since Vittorio Cappello's extraordinary favour with the Grand Duke, several Venetian nobles had flocked to the gay court of Florence; and even those who were not Venetians, attracted by the renown of its pleasures and festivities, had come from the ponderous splendours of Venice, to flutter in the sparkling atmosphere of the Tuscan court. Among these, were Don Gomez de Sylva, the Spanish ambassador; and among the former, Filippo Borgia. Torquato Tasso, too, who, disgusted with his persecutions, had made his escape from the Franciscans at Ferrara, leaving them every

thing, even to his manuscripts, was now passing through Florence, on his way to his sister Cornelia, at Sorrento; but although Scipio de Gonzaga, the friend of his early youth, had recommended him to the good offices of the Cardinal de Medici, and the latter had prevailed upon his brother, the Grand Duke, to offer him a high and lucrative appointment in his household, yet the poet, destitute as he was of all this world's good things, refused to enter the service of Francesco de Medici, from an over-refined feeling of gratitude to his early patrons, the D'Este family.

It was this influx of Venetians, and "old acquaintance," at Florence, that awakened in Bianca Cappello the puerile vanity of wishing to dazzle them with her splendour; or, perhaps (for within the heart there is ever an under-current of real motives, which does not always rise even to the surface of our own perception), she thought to eclipse, with her splendour and pomp, the deformity of her vice: for by this time she knew the world so thoroughly, that she was fully aware, that even the errors which seek for charity in rags can find neither pity

nor toleration ; while the crimes that are dressed in ermine and velvet, may hold a court, and will not lack courtiers. Having set her heart upon giving a magnificent ‘festa di ballo,’ in the villa Strozzi, she was determined to carry her point, though Francesco de Medici had for a long time resisted her importunities, pleading the expenses of the Archduke’s christening, and the enormous cost of the still unpaid-for grounds at Pratolino. But what was a discontented people, or a drained treasury, compared to the dearly-bought caresses of a mistress, who, having no love, could not be expected to have any pity for the victim she was ever impelling forward to destruction ? Strange ! that men, whom it is almost impossible to influence to do right, are so easily led to do wrong : it must be that their vanity cannot resist the assumed affection and adulation required to achieve the latter point ; for it is very certain that gentlemen in the position of Francesco de Medici, are precisely on a par with the clay gods of the Chinese,—who are only idols as long as they grant every request made to them ; but are either abandoned or torn to pieces, as

useless incumbrances, the moment they turn a deaf ear to the petitions they receive.

Poor Grand Duke ! his will was sovereign elsewhere in Tuscany, but at the villa Strozzi he was only a slave. Consequently, coloured lamps in that beautiful villa peopled every tree, on a soft July night, till the grounds had the appearance of Aladdin's garden of gems,—music concealed in the different boschettos and shrubberies, stole ever and anon mystically upon the hushed and balmy air: while the resplendent moon, in cold calm dignity, looked gently down on the mimic brilliancy below. Francesco finding that all resistance had been vain, as he was to do it, determined to "do his spiriting gently," and therefore entered 'con amore' into the spirit of this festa ; the more so, that, secretly owing a grudge to certain of his courtiers who had openly espoused the Grand Duchess's cause and the Cardinal's party, he resolved upon that night to pay them off in a way that should increase the mirth of the festa at their expense. A small pond, which still exists in the gardens of the villa Strozzi, near the fountain of Hercules, was

then, as now, filled with stagnant water. This pond the Duke resolved to have drained and filled with wine, which should be communicated to the reservoir of the Hercules ; so that all the world would naturally flock to see the son of Jupiter and Alemena.

Entering on his new labour, of quaffing a pond full of wine at a given signal,—the pond itself he resolved to have boarded over with very slight planks, that being afterwards gravelled, appeared uniform with the rest of the ground, but which, upon any extraordinary pressure, would be sure to give way, and plunge those on their surface into the depths below. Now, the only difficulty was, to find an artizan of sufficient ingenuity to carry this plan into execution, and of sufficient discretion to keep the secret when executed. The Duke was aware that parties ran so high, or rather that he was so unpopular, that no Florentine could be trusted, as they would indubitably put the Cardinal's faction on their guard. Here, then, was a dilemma that seemed insurmountable. What was to be done ? But Bianca's invention was seldom at fault ; and she, knowing his

mechanical genius, and that his services and silence could always be insured at an adequate price, suggested the temporary release of Giovanni Ferrai, who had been thrown into solitary confinement, there to end his days, ever since Arianna's arrival at Florence.— Charmed with the idea, Francesco instantly availed himself of it; and awaited, as impatiently as a child does the advent of a new toy, the night of the festa. It came at length, as all thing do, whether evil or good.

Seated on a temporary throne at the entrance of the grounds, entirely composed of the rarest flowers, Bianca received her guests as Flora: her beauty, considerably heightened by being divested of the cumbrous dress of the time, and her magnificent hair being classically arranged. Francesco felt that he was somewhat too material to undertake the part of Zephyrus, and therefore contented himself with having enacted the Tatius to this beautiful Flora, who, nevertheless, did not lack Zephyrs, Loves, and Graces, in abundance; especially as her cornucopia was filled with trinkets and gems, which she distributed to the different

guests as they entered. On all the refreshment tables, which were profusely scattered about the grounds, were gold enamelled cups, or vases filled with perfumes, embroidered gloves and fans.

“ Well, certainly there is no disputing La Bianca’s taste,” said the Gonfaloniere, looking around and addressing the new-made Cardinal, Ignatius Dragoni, Don Gomez de Sylva, and the Cardinal de Medici. “ What thinks your Eminence of the Grand Duke’s munificence, too? They say he has filled the reservoirs with wine, and that at a given signal Hercules is to get as drunk as Bacchus !”

“ Bah !” replied Ferdinando de Medici, pettishly—“ Les amoureux font dans la société ce que les fanatiques font en religion.” *

“ Eh, how so ?” said Don Gomez de Sylva ; “ you, signor Gonfaloniere, who are ‘ tam Mercurio quam Marti,’ expound this to us, pray.”

“ Why, I suppose,” laughed Martin Bernardini, “ his Eminence means, that lovers, like fanatics, while they pester their divinity

* So at least said the gallant, but ungallant, Prince Eugene.

with prayers from morning till night, either sacrifice or neglect the rest of the world without mercy."

"There about," replied the Cardinal.

"It is terrible," said Ignatius Dragoni, who remembered that he was talking to the Cardinal de Medici and the Gonfaloniere, "to think that while the exemplary and virtuous Joan of Austria is pining in neglected loneliness, such a woman as Bianca Cappello is the adulated queen of this scene of enchantment."

"Nay," said Don Gomez de Silva, touching with the hilt of his rapier as he spoke the Jesuit's newly-acquired scarlet hat, "with all due deference to your Eminence's pious indignation, you must at least allow the last-named lady *one cardinal virtue*, though perhaps neither prudence nor justice."

Dragoni thought it wise in the presence of Don Gomez, who knew him far better than his other two companions, to adopt the former of these virtues, and therefore remained silent.

While this conversation was going on at one part of the gardens, the Grand Duke was busying himself in the preparations for his plot

near the statue of the colossal Hercules ; but that incomparable individual, though somewhat ‘gauche,’ courtier, signor Millantatore, who had not tact enough to perceive that the Prince at that moment was in such a state of pre-occupation that he had the bad taste not to crave his company, still persisted in overwhelming him with compliments, as colossal as the statue near which they were standing, relative to the unparalleled taste he had displayed in the arrangements of the festa; till the Duke, at length fairly exasperated beyond all patience, told him to “ begone, for a prating fool.”

This unguarded truth had such an effect upon the weak nerves of poor Millantatore, that he repaired to the mistress of the revels to lodge his complaint, pointing, at the conclusion of it (as the tears fell from his eyes), to his new-blown honours of the cross and scarf of San Steffano ; “ really, bella Bianca,” added he, “ if it were only this cross which your goodness obtained for me, it might have shielded me from such an insult from the Duke.”

“ Alas ! signor Millantatore,” she replied, with an acuminous smile, which doubly barbed

the shaft that raised the laugh against poor Millantatore ; “ although I have it in my power sometimes to procure crosses, you see the Duke still reserves to himself the privilege of conferring titles.”*

“ Ah ! you see,” said Gonzo Damorino, “ the signora says, it is not in her power to bestow titles ; so, perhaps, you will never get the order of San Steffano after all.”

“ But I have got it,” roared Millantatore in his step-son’s ear, as they walked away together ; the latter not over pleased at the commencement of his evening’s amusement.”

“ And as you have not got it,” pursued and persisted Gonzo, “ the best plan is to think no more about it ; for I have discovered the only way to be happy in this world is never to wish for anything :—and if you get it, well and good ; for it is then too late to wish for it.”

Millantatore, who lived post (for steam was not then invented), felt that both time and life

* This was a ‘bon mot,’ on a similar occasion, of the present Grand Duke of Lucca, who has as much wit as most men, to say nothing of princes, and who, if not ‘le prince des philosophes,’ is certainly ‘le plus philosophie des princes.’

were too short to profit by his step-son's tortoise-progressions in philosophy ; and being moreover what was in those days emphatically termed a cloak-grasper,* he now perceived the Conte Ricci, who having also on his side perceived him, was hastily, like a startled deer, making his escape through an adjacent thicket of flowering myrtles ; so that in vain he cried, at the top of his voice,

“ Ricci—Ricci—one moment—a word with you——”

For the louder Millantatore called, the faster the Count ran ; till, quite exhausted from his vocal exertions, the former sunk down upon a bench, splenetically exclaiming,

“ I declare Ricci is deaf as well as blind ; and though the latter may be very convenient for his wife, the former is very inconvenient for his friends ! ”

Millantatore had only occupied his seat a few minutes, when he heard Bonaventuri's voice, accompanied by a mandolin (but both in a subdued tone), singing the following song :—

* The cloak-grasper of the sixteenth century was the paternal ancestor of the button-holder of the nineteenth.

“Near the dark myrtle shade, with a low serenade,
As woos the young flowers the bee,
Where the bright waters glide, with their murmur’ring tide,
I’ll wait, my Clorinda, for thee.

“There’s no music so sweet as thy light-falling feet,
When their echoes steal over my heart!
’Tis thus meeting, my girl, in fate’s cup is the pearl,
Which sorrow dissolves when we part.

“Alas! Time’s on the wing, so come, let us fling
Love’s rainbow o’er life as he flies;
For if aught can delay, or tempt him to stay,
’Twill be the deep spell of thine eyes.”

“Ho! ho! Signor Bonaventuri, does the wind still sit in that quarter? Doubtless then there was something in Ricci’s heels that told his ears he would be one too many if he lingered any longer in that said dark myrtle shade,” said Millantatore; “but,” added he, “as I live, there goes the rocket that was to be the first signal for the banquet of Hercules,” and so saying he arose and hastened with the rest of the crowd, who were hurrying from all directions to the one focus of attraction.

This rocket was merely to give notice to all the assembled guests scattered in different parts of the grounds; but the final signal was to be given by the Duke himself, and was to

be announced by the rising of a magnificent peacock, done in fireworks.

Previous to giving this signal, Francesco de Medici, with great apparent suavity, was exerting himself to secure the best places for his victims, and calling out their names aloud, “ Signor Nero, this way ! Bettino Ricasoli, more to the left ! Cavaliero Monaco, from this point will be the best view ; Caliario and Signori Sanessi, forward ; mio caro Ginori, here ! Germanico Saurniano, Scotto Ferrante dal Monte, Luigi Porto, Federigo, Raffaello, Gualterotti, further to the left, I pray you ! But where are our good friends Count Ricci and the Intendant ? Ho ! Signor Bonaventuri ! Signor Ricci ? ” but echo did not even answer “ where ? ” Again, and yet again, the Duke called out the names of the absentees, but a dead silence was the only answer.

During this pause, the Cardinal de Medici whispered the Gonfalonieri—

“ Here is another stroke of the subtle policy of ‘ la detestabile Bianca ! ’ Did you mark the Duke’s civility to all our party ? He did not mention a single friend of his own, in his

anxiety to procure his guests a good view of this folly,—except the Intendant."

The names of Ricci and Bonaventuri again rang through all the intricacies of space, but neither of their owners appeared.

"Che vada! let it go!" muttered the Duke, impetuously, and then gave the signal, when the illuminated bird rose proudly in the air, irradiating the giant head of the Hercules, while the bright scintillas of its myriad sparks again descended and mingled with the ruby flood, which he tossed upwards, as if pledging the moon ere he drank it.

Enchanted with so novel a display, the courtiers clapped their hands, and kept such vehement time with the shuffling of their feet to their reiterated 'bravissimos,' that, lo ! the treacherous planks gave way, and with one tremendous splash and universal yell, they were plunged, with all their costly gala dresses, into the unfragrant pool of muddy wine, below.

Martin Bernardini, who involuntarily paid his court, by laughing almost as loudly as the Duke himself, could not resist turning to the Cardinal de Medici, and saying—

"It would appear, that this stroke of the Bianca's (if indeed the merit of the device be not entirely your royal brother's) is even more subtle than your Eminence gave her credit for; for gaining partizans is one thing, but stocking ponds is another!"

"Especially with such gudgeons," interposed the Duke, who overheard the remark.

But as spoiling their clothes, and giving them an impromptu bath, was the extent of Francesco de Medici's premeditated vengeance, he now gave orders to have them rescued from the jeopardy they were in, which their own efforts only tended to increase; for the more they tried to extricate themselves, the deeper they got in the mud, as both wine and water were now evidently ebbing.

During their rescue, the Duke and the rest of the court walked away to another part of the grounds, considerately leaving them to make an unwitnessed retreat as they best could.

When the last victim was safely dragged to *terra firma*, Cardinal Dragoni, who had stood leaning against a tree, from whence he had seen the whole process, was about to walk

away, when he was stopped by Ugolino Haredia, the blind boy, laying his hand upon his tippet, and saying—

“ Sweet sir, whoever you are—stop—listen ! I hear groans beneath the earth !”

“ My son, I hear nothing,” said Dragoni, inclining his ear downwards.

“ Ha ! there it is again,” rejoined the blind boy, still listening, but raising his hand as he spoke, and touching Ignatius’s hat. “ You should be a cardinal, by your hat ; if so, then I entreat your Eminence to follow me to the subterranean caves of the grotto, which are close by ; for as sure as we are here, some one has either lost his way, or come to harm down below !”

“ But, my son, I know not the way to these caverns, and, therefore, we may incur danger without rescuing others.”

“ Not so, I know every wind of them,” said Ugolino ; “ there are plenty of torches at the entrance of the grotto ; your Eminence has only to take one of them and follow me, and I will lead you safely.”

“ You are sure, my son, that you are not

about to practise on me another of the Grand Duke's pleasantries?"

"Rather than your Eminence should think so, I will go alone," said the boy; "I am not afraid,—for darkness and I are friends that never deceive each other;—but if there should be danger to any one else, I wanted eyes to see it, for those I have not got."

"Then, by St. Francis! you shall have mine," said Ignatius; "for you seem a fine little fellow,—so come along."

Ugolino did not wait for a second invitation, but walked, or rather ran, forward, dragging the Cardinal after him, till they entered the grotto, which was close at hand,—when, seizing a torch, and giving it to the Cardinal, he proceeded more cautiously, till they found themselves in the very heart of the cavern, underneath the water works, when their progress was impeded by a pool of mud and slime, mixed with the strong fumes of wine,—in the midst of which lay a man, quite dead, apparently from suffocation, grasping an iron bar in one hand, and an extinguished torch in the other; as his head protruded forward into the

outward cavern, where Dragoni was standing, as if (as most probably was the case), in attempting to escape, he had been thrown backward, from the influx of the stream. The Cardinal, on raising the torch, beheld, at the other end of the cavern, that the door of the sluice had been left open: and it might be that, in too tardily trying to remedy this neglect, the individual before him had met his death.

"Go, my son," said Ignatius, "and bring hither two serving-men,—for though I fear life is totally extinct, it behoves us to ascertain the fact beyond a doubt."

Ugolino was scarcely gone, before Dragoni heard a low clear voice, which, having once heard, was never forgotten, saying, beside him, "I congratulate Cardinal Dragoni upon having his *hat*, otherwise he might chance to take cold in these caverns."

Ignatius raised his eyes, and beheld Magini! who, not giving him time to reply, added, as, with a branch of cypress that he held in his hand, he removed the mire from the dead man's face, and disclosed the features of the Venice

goldsmith, frightfully convulsed, from his ineffectual struggles with the death which had overtaken him at the very moment when he thought he had secured both fortune and liberty.—

“ You see that the devil has had his due,— so there is no use in our remaining here ; especially as a murder has been done in the boschetto of myrtles within the last five minutes, which may involve more important consequences.”

Dragoni stared at his extraordinary companion without finding the power of utterance.

“ You may remember,” resumed Magini, “ a conversation we had upon the subject of divorce in the gardens of the ‘ Mille feuilles,’ at Paris, about a year ago ? One divorce has been just accomplished ; and the other will be granted in due course, without the intervention of the pope.”

At the entrance of the grotto they met Ugolino, with two servants bearing torches.

“ Giovanni Ferrai is quite dead,” said Magini to the latter ; “ but you had better bear him back to his dungeon in the Pallazzo

Vecchio:—as being the Gonfaloniere's prisoner, his body is his property."

"Had we not better repair to the boschetto, where you say this murder has been done?" said Ignatius, as soon as his nerves had been sufficiently braced by the fresh night air, to recover their tone from the bewilderment the sudden apparition of Magini had thrown them into.

"There is no occasion," replied the latter; "tis the work of one head and several hands,—and were we to be found on the spot, our's might be confounded amongst them. But come,—the banquet has begun! our places are still vacant, and we shall miss the first attack upon the Trojan boar."*

In a temporary pavilion, erected near the chapel, in the gardens of the villa Strozzi, sat Francesco de Medici and Bianca Cappello, at

* It was the custom among the ancient Romans, a custom followed by all the Italian people of the Middle Ages, to have at their great banquets, a boar filled with innumerable lesser animals, such as hares and rabbits, also poultry and game of every description, in imitation of the well-populated wooden horse of Troy. The magnate of the feast had always the honour of cutting up this Trojan boar, with the still more enviable privilege of cutting every other *bore* besides,

supper, surrounded by their courtiers and their guests. Bright flowers bloomed, and brighter eyes sparked. The spicy ruby and the fragrant amber wines brimmed the golden cups, till they looked as if the jewels around them had dissolved into one bright universal flood ; and the music that every now and then stole upon the ear of the revellers, was scarcely more harmonious than the silvery laugh of one half the crowd, occasioned by the jests or the flattery of the other half. The Contessa Ricci laughed too ; but it was the cold, hollow laugh, that merely echoes the mirth of others, when the heart is away, and cannot fill it. She looked towards the entrance of the pavilion incessantly ; and then she turned and tried to appear interested in the conversation of Tasso, who sat beside her, and who was commenting on Camillo Pellegrino's work on Epic Poetry, to which his "*Jerusalem*" had given rise. The poet at length perceived that she neither heard nor understood one word he was saying ; and was good-humouredly going to tell her so, when Ghirihizzo, coming behind her chair, placed in her hands a sealed packet, which, he said, the

Conte Ricci's page had just transmitted to him, with orders to have it given immediately to the signora Contessa. She knew not why, but she trembled as she opened it. She had no sooner done so, than a piercing shriek escaped her, and she fell back senseless in her chair. The packet contained a miniature of herself, that she had given Bonaventuri, and which he constantly wore, and had, as she knew, worn that night, when she had met him in the myrtle shrubbery, near the lake. It was now pierced with a small Venetian dagger, wreaking with blood, and on the paper that enclosed it was written, in Count Ricci's hand—

“ Your friend, the Intendant, has just fallen near the bridge by the lake that borders the myrtle grove ; pierced by twenty stilettos, from which, it must be confessed, he defended himself as gallantly as one pair of hands could do. I return you this picture ; for, though the person whom it represents is thoroughly worthless, yet the brilliants around it are of much value, and form a small portion of the honour of my family, which it is not in the power of an adventurer to alienate.”

The Duke, who had left his seat to offer his assistance as soon as the Contessa Ricci had fainted, raised the paper she had dropped, and with trembling hands, and an agitated voice, read it aloud.

“Signors!” added Francesco de Medici, looking hastily round, “the Intendant lies murdered in the boschetto of myrtles! I rely upon your exertions to track the villains that have done the deed; and let a price of two hundred francesconi be upon each of their heads, unless indeed it were a matter of private quarrel between the Count Ricci and the deceased,—for with such we have no power.”

Swift as lightning the pavilion was cleared, and the table, with its magnificent decorations, and its now fading flowers, and hastily overturned wine-cups, presented all the chaotic confusion of a deserted banquet.

Bianca, who alone amid all the differently excited multitude had expressed neither grief, horror, nor surprise, beyond a sudden palor more ghastly than that of death, now mechanically, but calmly, unbound the pure and glittering wreath that circled her forehead, and laying it

gently on the table, walked, with a firm step and immovable features, to the chair where sat her still fainting rival, whose hands the Duke was ineffectually chafing.

“Send for the Contessa’s women,” said she, in a low voice, to a page who stood by; and then, looking steadily for a few minutes at the inanimate features of the once beautiful woman before her, she added, as she took her cold hand in hers,—“this night has wrought a miracle! We are friends now; for we are equally miserable! Poor soul, I pity you! for death is a more cruel and triumphant rival than even you were!” And, with these words, she quitted the pavilion.

Francesco de Medici passed the remainder of that strange eventful night in witnessing and experiencing one of those wild, mysterious, and inexplicable anomalies of nature,—for he passed it in sympathising in the grief of Bianca Cappello for the death of her husband!

CHAPTER X.

“Les effets de la faiblesse sont inconcédables, et je maintiens qu’ils sont plus prodigieux encore que ceux des passions les plus violentes. Elle assemble plus souvent quaucune autre passion les contradictoires.”—CARDINAL DE RETZ.

“Love, sole lord and monarch of itself
 Allows no ties, no dictates but its own ;
 To that mysterious arbitrary power,
 Reason points out, and duty pleads in vain.”

Motley's IMPERIAL CAPTIVES.

Two years had elapsed since the last festa in the Villa Strozzi, which had terminated in the assassination of Bonaventuri ; other events had also occurred since then, all more or less of a painful nature to Bianca ; for it appears a part of the system of the harmony of nature, that previous to the advent of some dire and terrible misfortune, we should be prepared as it were for its approach, by a prelude of minor evils.

The young usurper, the Archduke Antonio,

having evinced decided symptoms of idiotey, had died at the end of a twelvemonth, leaving Bianca to reap the punishment of her crime in her diminished influence, and the constant persecution of the maniac visits of Giovannina Neri, in whose power she was far too deeply to treat her otherwise than with a servile forbearance.

Arianna had bestowed her hand on Ernesto Vasi, who had no ambition but her love, and who steered clear of all the graspings after unhallowed power, which floated the barks that bore men's destinies, in those days, on a sea of blood.

But as Bianca's political position was materially altered, that is, lowered, by the death of the Archduke, and the Cardinal's prospects were consequently again in the ascendant, the Gonfaloniere had virtuously returned the bridal gifts (costly as they were), which the favourite had sent her early friend, Arianna; but her annoyances did not end here, for she felt, to its fullest extent, the reversionary odium of her brother Vittorio's unpopularity, which at

length reached such a climax, from his employment of—

—“Rogues that could extract
Fines out of looks, and death from double meanings ;”

and his practical illustrations of his Venetian principle, of always presuming where doubt was, that crime existed ;* that, to prevent open rebellion, the Grand Duke was obliged to conciliate the people by banishing him from Tuscany.

Peace was thus restored to the state, or rather to the court, for a short time ; but the last act of the tragedy of Bianca’s life had still to come ; and as she sat alone, and in tears, in her splendid, but now deserted, villa, listening to the cannon that was firing for the birth of a legitimate Archduke, she thought it had come. But truly “God’s ways are not as our ways,” and it is not always when we fear the most, that we have the most reason to fear.

The day after the cannons roared for the birth of her son, the great bell of the Duomo tolled for the death of Joan of Austria. Bianca

* The infamous maxim of the Council of Ten.

was again alone, and that fearful stillness, which is the loudest accuser of the guilty, reigned around ; at length it was broken by the solemn and lugubrious sound of the great bell, for two more days had passed, and the remains of the Grand Duchess were being consigned to the tomb.

“ I did not murder her ! ” said Bianca, covering her eyes with her hands, and then, as if appalled at the hollow hoarse sound of her own voice, she arose, and walked up and down the room.

She passed the day in alternately hoping and fearing she knew not what. She dared not intrude upon the Duke’s privacy,—it might be on his remorse ! by writing to him ; “ but why did he not write to her ? ” She had asked herself this question more than twenty times, but could give it no satisfactory answer.

The evening was closing in, and she had not yet ceased from the match she was walking against her own thoughts, when the door opened, and Ghirihizzo, without uttering a word, and with an unusually sorrowful face, lit two gold Greek lamps, filled with perfumed

naphtha, that stood upon lapis-lazuli pedestals, and placing a packet, sealed with the royal arms, in Bianca's hand, instantly withdrew.

"Why so large?" said she, growing pale, and turning the packet in every direction; "it is parchment too! but still the address is in the Duke's own hand. I—I—feel—ill—faint—I will not read it till to-morrow!" and flinging it on a table, she sank down upon a couch. "But, no! no!" added she, "this is folly—some official etiquette that he is obliged to observe: deaths are always announced to one's nearest and dearest ceremoniously,"* and so saying, she rushed rather than walked to the table, and seizing the packet tore it open.

She had no sooner glanced her eye over its contents, than, crumpling it convulsively in her clenched hand, she stood as if she had suddenly looked upon a Medusa, and been turned to stone!

This packet contained an official order, legally drawn up, but signed with awful legi-

* It is the custom in Italy, among the nobles, to announce a death or marriage in their families by sending round printed papers to their acquaintance informing them of the event.

bility by Francesco de Medici, "for the banishment for life of Bianca Capello, from Tuscany generally, and Florence especially, to take place in eight days from the date thereof."

The fact was, that Francesco,—like all persons of weak minds, shallow heads, and small hearts,—was not only apt to fall into the error of thinking the reverse of wrong, right; but was always eventually influenced by the argument, or even sophistries of the last speaker, from being in himself totally incapable of logically weighing and comparing facts, and from having no sense of justice to appeal to in the summing up of his own internal evidence. No sooner, therefore, had death canonized into a saint the wife of whom he had made a martyr, than his feeble-minded remorse dictated to him, that the surest way to appease the manes of Joan, would be to transfer the cruelty and injustice which he had in life exercised towards her to her rival; and his brother the Cardinal was not slow, under the cloak of religious exhortation, of taking advantage of this frame of mind, to achieve the disgrace of one whom he so cordially detested as Bianco Capello; but

all his zeal might have proved fruitless, had not his infant nephew—his brother's long-wished-for heir—followed its mother to the grave three days after its birth ;—a circumstance which the Cardinal did not fail to work up into a judgment, with which he duly terrified the Duke into a belief that his only hope of salvation depended upon his banishing his mistress. But, alas ! if to every piece of misfortune there is some attendant good, so to every good fortune there is some attendant evil ; and it was therefore impossible that Ferdinando de Medici should have brought his brother to such a pious and repentant state of mind, without that mind going of its own accord still further, and wishing to unburden itself in confession : but unfortunately the Cardinal, both from his consanguinity, and his position now as heir apparent, could not be his confessor ; and Cardinal Dragoni, who *was*, (being latterly, for reasons best known to himself, entirely in Bianca's interest), it was expedient, above all things, to keep away from the Duke ; consequently, whenever the latter urged his wish to confess, his brother exhorted him to wait till the source of

his most flagrant sins was removed, and that then he would be in a more proper frame of mind for so holy a purpose;—and hence the brief time of preparation allotted to Bianca in her order of banishment. As soon as her paralyzed blood again began to flow, and her muscles to lose their spell-bound rigidity, the thought of Giovanina Neri, and her intercourse with Magini, made her (in that catching at phantoms which the wretched are ever prone to) resolve to seek the old woman in her usual haunt, the cavern of the grotto. So, concealing the fatal parchment in her bosom, and hastily putting on a mantle, she rushed into the gardens. There was no moon, but myriads of stars glittered in the deep blue sky above her, and, as she hurried onwards with that preternatural buoyancy which desperation gives, she felt as if by her simple volition she could have scaled the skies, and plucked another destiny from the brightest of them !

When she reached the grotto, she called in vain upon Giovannina, for she was only answered by the echos of her own voice ; “ If I only knew where she lived I would go to her.”

"Hush," said a voice, "speak low, or rather be silent, and listen to what I have to say, for time presses."

Bianca turned to the direction from whence the voice came, and beheld Dragoni, not in his Cardinal's robes, but in the poor and much-worn dress of a mendicant monk;—a small dark lantern which he held in his hand he placed on the rustic table as he spoke.

"I am aware," he commenced, in hurried accents, but a subdued tone, "of the order of banishment you have received within the last hour, as is all Florence, for you may be sure the Cardinal de Medici and the Gonfaloniere did not let the grass grow over their triumph; the Duke still refuses me admittance, but I have written him a letter, highly approving of the step he has taken, and the repentance it evinces,—for it would ruin all if I seemed your partizan, since my great object is to gain an interview with the Duke, for which reason I have urged on him the necessity of confession. This interview once obtained, I shall tell him that, though he is right to banish you, he is wrong not to take leave of you in a spirit of

Christian charity. In order to do so he must see you. This great point once accomplished, I leave the rest to you. Now do you understand?"

"I do," replied Bianca.

"But remember," pursued the Jesuit, "the conditions,—once Grand Duchess of Tuscany, you pledge yourself ever to place Venice and its political intrigues at my disposal, as far as you, through your position, can become possessed of them; for by this lure alone have I brought Philip of Spain over to your interests; and should you ever feel any womanish weakness on the score of patriotism, summon to your councils the injuries and insults you have received from the senate and republic of Venice, and the vengeance that you owe them. For all the rest nature has absolved you, for both your father and the Patriarch of Aquilea sleep with their ancestors. Now return to the villa, enact the masque of meek submission, by ordering the preparations for your departure, and before the appointed day arrives, I promise you that you shall have to counterorder them."

Bianca was about to reply, but Ignatius

waved his hand, and taking the lantern, disappeared as noiselessly as he had come. Cheered by his prophetic promise, and relieved from the turmoil of action by the negative line of conduct he had enjoined her, she retraced her steps to the house, much more slowly, and infinitely more calmly than she set out.

She had no sooner entered the gallery leading from the vestibule, than she perceived the figure of a woman closely veiled ; but before she had time to ask any questions, the veil was off and the arms of Arianna were round her neck. As soon as their mutual tears had sufficiently subsided to allow them to speak, Bianca was the first to do so.

“ You are not aware, then, of my disgrace,—my banishment ?” said she.

“ It is because I am aware of it, that you see me here,” replied Arianna.

“ And do you not fear the contamination of such an atmosphere ?” rejoined Bianca, with the ungrateful hauteur of momentary irritability.

“ Perfect love casteth out fear,” said Arianna, “ and I did love you dearly when you were innocent ; I mourned over you when you were

guilty; but the pity I feel for you now that that guilt has met its punishment, makes me forget that it ever existed; for the heart that is filtered through sorrow and repentance only becomes the more pure and holy for its former corruption."

"Do not deceive yourself," said Bianca, shaking her head mournfully, "there is a corruption that cannot be purified, a sin that cannot repent; the service of the fiend is freedom, till he has thrown over the lost souls of his subjects the fetters of despair! But who can loosen those?"

"God!" replied Arianna, "but, dear, dearest Bianca, it is you who deceive yourself, it is ambition!—that leprosy of nations, that plague-spot of souls, that is destroying you. The craving for what is beyond us was the first dark progenitor of crime and sorrow; in seeking to equal the power of God, the angels fell; in aspiring to his knowledge, man fell; but in presuming to make errata or additions to our destinies, which the Almighty has graven on the tablets of eternity, we draw down upon ourselves the avenging fires of heaven. Be

warned then in time, it is only in sin that there is no hope,—leave it, and hope is instantly visible in the horizon ! Remember the beautiful eastern legend,—which is no fable,—that though the gates of Eden are of rock, and their bars of adamant, yet the first tear of true repentance that falls upon them, they open wide.”

“ Alas ! ” said Bianca, bursting into a flood of tears ; “ I have gone too far—I am pledged too deep ! I cannot go back even if I would ! I am not alone in my sin;” (who is?) “and were I now, at the eleventh hour, to retract, my destruction would be the penalty.”

“ And what,” said Arianna, “ is the destruction of a poor perishable body, which brings with it but one certainty into life—that of death !—compared to the destruction of the soul, which is for an eternity ? ”

“ What would you have me do ? ” asked Bianca, irresolutely.

“ Return with me to Venice, and seek that peace in seclusion, and the companionship of true hearts (their rarity might tempt you), that experience must have taught you is certainly

neither to be found in ambition, nor in the sins it entails."

"Arianna, you have never loved," said Bianca, hanging her head, and having recourse to an unworthy subterfuge.

"I have loved,—but of that I am ashamed ; I do love,—and in that I glory ! Poor Bianca ! it would have been well for you if you never had loved !—but you never did love Francesco de Medici. But, come—come ! we lose time ; Ernesto is waiting for me in the street, and I must have your answer :—for I dare not repeat my visit, for fear of my uncle's vengeance."

Finding that Bianca was still silent, Arianna continued : "Oh ! if my heart could speak to you instead of my tongue, you would not—you could not—resist it ; for you would know that it had but two feelings—love and fear—for you."

"If an angel were to speak to me," said Bianca, rising, and replacing Arianna's veil upon her head; ("and if you are not one, I fear I shall never see one), it would be no use : the bargain has been struck and my soul bartered too long. I feel a power that you cannot feel, —and God forbid you ever should,—which

impels me forward, even to destruction, and which I must obey ! Farewell then, dear Arianna ! if I cannot benefit from your kindness, neither can I forget it :—for your goodness is as that of heaven, which, though faultless itself, has yet so much more mercy than justice, that it pities even if it cannot save.”

Here the monks of Santa Maria Novella chaunting the *De Profundis*, in the Via della Scala, in commemoration of the Grand Duchess’s funeral, warned Arianna to depart.

“ Farewell then for ever !”

“ Not for ever !—oh, say not for ever !” cried Bianca, as she fell upon her knees and took the hand of her first and last—her only friend.

“ For ever !” repeated Arianna, breaking from her with a convulsive sob.

“ Yes—yes—I feel the ice upon my heart,—it is for ever ! and I am now indeed alone !” said Bianca, rising, and riveting her eyes on the door through which Arianna had passed.

* * * * *

That day week Bianca Cappello was to quit Florence. Horses and sumpter mules filled the

Via della Scala ; but few bipeds hovered near the now dismantled Villa Strozzi. The Gonfaloniere, it is true, had paid the ceremonious insult of a farewell visit ; but at eleven o'clock the Cardinal Dragoni came, to conduct the discarded favourite to the Pitti,—for the Grand Duke had consented to a farewell interview. Dressed in black velvet, with no ornaments, yet never had Bianca, after her most studied and splendid toilettes, looked so beautiful. Even Ignatius could not help exclaiming,

“ ‘Twill do ! you cannot fail ! the heart of the Grand Duke can never resist you ! ”

As they traversed the gardens of the Boboli (for they had purposely chosen the most public route), even the people, whose worst enemy Bianca had been, were moved to pity by her wondrous beauty ; while the courtiers, whom she had showered benefits upon, kept studiously out of the way,—which she having remarked to her companion, as they approached the palace, he replied,

“ Let them : for see, the Duke has already walked twice to the window,—and this impa-

tience,—anxiety,—nervousness,—call it what you will—looks well."

When they had reached the second landing of the great staircase, they met the Cardinal de Medici coming out of his brother's closet. Bowing coldly to Bianca, he said that it was the Duke's wish, that Ignatius should wait without, to reconduct the signora,—for, as he had some state papers of importance to sign, the interview could not be long."

An almost imperceptible smile played round Bianca's mouth, as she returned the Cardinal's cold salutation with one equally frigid, and turned down the corridor to the right, till she reached the Duke's cabinet, which is now called the 'Camera di Marte,' Chamber of Mars), on the ceiling of which was, and is, a fresco of Cosimo Primo,—as a young warrior leaping out of a boat, spear in hand, while Mars assists him by darting lightning at his enemies. Here she entered, and the door closed after her; while Dragoni remained without, feeling, and almost looking, as formidable as if he was guarding the Hesperides.

At length an hour elapsed, but no Bianca returned.

"This looks well!" thought Ignatius.

On the contrary: "This delay bodes no good," thought Ferdinando de Medici, as he shuffled up to the door, his hand filled with papers; but all he said was,

"Really your Eminence must be tired of your post; this parting is of the longest."—

"Unaccountably so!" replied the Jesuit, with one of those shugs that diplomatically stand sponsor to every thing, without pledging themselves to any thing.

"I think the Duke had better be informed how time goes. What think you?"

"Your Eminence may certainly take the fraternal privilege of breaking in upon his Highness's privacy; but I dare not," said Dragoni.

The Cardinal de Medici laid his hand upon the lock of the door—then withdrew it—and then, for the second time, turned it. But now there was a counter force within; for the door opened from the other side, and a page appeared with a small gold salver in each hand—each salver containing a letter, which, with a

bow, he presented to the two Cardinals. They were both from the Grand Duke, and contained only a few lines each: that to the Cardinal Ferdinando announced that his brother would transact no official business till the following week; and that to the Cardinal Dragoni, that he was forthwith to see the villa Strozzi set in order, and counteract the preparations for Bianca's departure.

Ferdinando de Medici's hand fell with the letter clasped in it, while looking with a sort of dream-like bewilderment in Dragoni's face, he said, "What does this mean?"

The Jesuit, copying with such inimitable exactness his companion's gesture, intonation, and surprise, that he might at that moment have been taken for a mirror and an echo, gave back the question, and said—"What does it mean?"

It meant,—unless, as Seneca avers, that all history is a lie—that Bianca Cappello was privately married, before that day month, to Francesco de Medici!

CONCLUSION.

“L’histoire est toute différente de la poësiè ; le poëte a besoin de tous les dieux : quand il veut peindre Agamemnon, il lui faut la tête et les yeux de Jupiter, la poitrine de Neptune, la bouclier de Mars. L’historien peint Philippe borgne, *comme il étoit.*”—LE PRESIDENT DE THOU.

FRANCESCO DE MEDICI having announced his private marriage with Bianca Cappello to Philip the Second of Spain, and obtained, for reasons already known to the reader, his countenance and protection, he next announced it to the Doge and Republic of Venice ; stating that his intention was to ally himself to them by the closest possible ties—those of publicly espousing a daughter of San Marco. Whereupon (so true a prophet was Martin Bernardini), the same magistrates who had exiled Bianca Cappello fifteen years before,

and set a price upon her husband's head, now hastened to overwhelm her with honours! For by a declaration of the Pregadi, of the 16th of June, 1579, she was named not only a genuine, but an especial daughter of the Republic. Two ambassadors, accompanied by four-and-twenty nobles, were despatched to Florence to solemnize at one and the same time, the more than regal splendour of her marriage, and the adoption of San Marco: which double ceremony was celebrated on the 12th of October, 1579.

Such was the extraordinary pomp of these nuptials, that they cost the state three hundred thousand ducats; and that at a time when debt and calamity of every kind weighed down the people. Among the foremost in their demonstrations of loyalty on this occasion, were the heroes of the wine-bath, at the villa Strozzi; all of whom went to an enormous expense in the decorations and construction of splendid mythological cars. So that Florence, for the time being, was turned into a perfect Olympus; and even Jupiter himself must have felt satisfied that, upon the score of profligacy,

he and his celestial subjects lost nothing by their terrestrial representatives.*

Twelve months after these bridal festivities, the Grand Duke and Duchess retired to the then favourite villa of Poggio Cajano, about ten miles from Florence. The house itself (with perhaps the exception of that of the Carregi de Medici) was the least handsome of all the Grand Ducal villas; but the grounds, which, strange to say, are detached from the villa, are very beautiful, and abounding in most harmonious nightingales.

It was in this retreat that the Cardinal de

* A description of these festivities, with plates, published at the time (*In Firenze, Nella Stamperia de Giunti, 1579*) is still extant, and is entitled,

“Feste Nelle Nozze
Del Serenissimo Don Francesco Medici
Granduca Di Toscana, Et della Serenissima
Sua consorte La Signora Bianca Cappello.
Composte da M. Raffaello Gualterotti.”

Then follows a fulsome Epithalamium, bearing the title of
“Vaghezze sopra Pratolino, composte Dal Signor
Raffaello Gualterotti—Al Serenissimo Don Francesco Medici
Secondo Granduca Di Toseano,”

And spoken by the said Signor Gualterotti, from his mythological car of love, drawn by geese!—Motto,
“’Ove, ’l piacer mi spinge.”

Medici's long stubborn hostility to Bianca, so far yielded, as to accept his brother's and her invitation to visit them. Accordingly, towards the sunny noon of a bright autumnal day, the ponderous coach of the Cardinal might be seen with its numerous suite of nobles and men-at-arms, drawing up, at the double flight of steps at the base of the stone terrace at Poggio Cajano, where Ferdinando de Medici and the Gonfaloniere alighted.

There were not wanting those among the courtiers to note, how leisurely the Cardinal ascended the steps, although the Duke was already on the terrace ready to greet him, braving the noon-day sun, which a violet silk awning scarcely tempered. But, however leisurely the Cardinal had walked up the steps, this apparent indifference was amply atoned for by the cordiality of manner with which he embraced his brother, who led him into the large gallery (now a billiard-room), which opens out upon the terrace. Here the Grand Duchess advanced to meet him; but there was a sort of defensive politeness in both their manners, which bore a striking analogy to the fresco of

two dogs, which may still be seen on the walls, one of which bears in its mouth a placard, with this inscription on it :

“ SI LATRABITIS, LATRABO.”*

Nevertheless, after the ice was once broken, each seemed to vie with the other who should be the most urbane, not to say cordial ; and Bianca herself, taking the Cardinal’s proffered arm, led him round the terrace, to a small iron door (which is now walled up, though the outline of it is still visible), but which then conducted up a winding staircase, to a suite of apartments opening on a terrace at the top of the house, which commanded an extensive view, and were considered the pleasantest in the villa ; and moreover, by means of this staircase, ingress and egress could he had to and from these rooms, without the necessity of passing through the house. These apartments were now consigned to the Cardinal, who was hospitably begged to consider the house as his own, without the Spanish injunction, never to forget that it was another’s.

* If ye will bark, I will bark.

After dinner, the day was passed in various ‘alfresco’ amusements about the grounds, which lasted till the brilliant light of a harvest moon reminded them it was time to return to supper. In those days the banqueting-hall at Poggio Cajano was below stairs, where the theatre now is. Ghiriluzzo, whose province it was always to carry a large gold basin full of ice into the hall for the wine, now entered, with his glittering burden, and proceeded round the table to drop a piece of the crystal luxury into each cup.

As he entered, he thought he had perceived some one leave the room by an opposite door; but the lamps were scarcely lit, and the light was uncertain; at all events, the circumstance made so little impression upon him, that he would not have given it a second thought, as he went round singing the *refrain* of a then popular comic song—

“ Non avete vergogna di darmi
Una carogna di questa sorta ? ”

and then continued imitating the noise of the cracking of a whip, as if chastising the sorry beast in question, till Ugolino put his hand upon his arm, and said—

“ Stop, Ghiriluzzo!—look well to the Duchess’s cup, aye, and to the wine too, for I thought I heard a hand move stealthily over the Benvenuto Cellini vase that always stands between the Duke and Duchess.”

“ But my good fellow,” said the dwarf, “ if thou heardest a hand, thou must more surely have heard a foot, and yet there’s no one but we twain in the hall.”

“ No, I heard no foot; for if there was any one, they were here before me; and when I thought I heard this hand, I went out by the nearest door to seek for you.”

“ That was foolish,” said Ghiriluzzo; “ for I do remember me now, that as I entered I thought I saw some one go out at the opposite door;—but first for the cups.—No, most assuredly there is nothing in them,” said the dwarf, removing the ice with a spoon, and examining the cups at the light, “ or the gold would have been black ere this. Now for the wine,” continued he, pouring a cup from the Duke’s flagon, and looking at it minutely athwart the light, as he transferred it to the cup. “ No, never drank better wine in my

life, and never desiro to drink worse;—it is all right, friend Ugo, thy fears have got on the blind side of thee, boy, that's all.”

“ I hope so,” said Ugolino, with a sigh ; “ but I had horrid dreams last night,”

“ What ! that I was turned into a giant, and that consequently thou couldst not command our august ear, as thou ever hast done, and ever shall do.”

“ Ghiriluzzo ! Ghiriluzzo !” cried a page, “ the Grand Duchess wants you.”

“ Blessings on her sweet face, may she never want more, and even that little she shall not want long ; but for thou,” added the dwarf, tapping Ugolino’s arm, and assuming a ludicrously consequential air, which was lost upon the poor blind boy, “ count ever upon our distinguished favour,” and so saying, he cleared the table at a bound, as if life were a thing that time could not wither, nor death uproot.

The banqueting-hall at Poggio Cajano resounded to the echos of conviviality ; and which flowed the most brightly, the wine, or the conversation, it would not have been easy to

determine ; but certain it was, that both the Cardinal de Medici and the Gonfaloniere were peculiarly brilliant.

"Poor Tasso," said the former, addressing Magini, who sat next to him, "he had better have accepted the Grand Duke's offer ; than have ended his days, as he is now likely to do, in a dungeon at Ferrara."

"Not so," replied Magini ; "he will live to have his merits acknowledged ; but, like many others, just as he attains his wishes, death will dispute the prize." *

"Really, signor Magini, said Martin Bernardini, sarcastically, as he leant across the table, "what think you of entertaining us all, by telling us the exact moment, how, and when, we shall meet our end ? Now do, if you *really* know."

"Socrates never wrote any thing,—as he

* As was the case, for Tasso's ill health preventing his being crowned by the Pope, when he arrived in Rome in the November of 1594, the ceremony was put off till the April of 1595 ; on the 25th of which month, the day appointed for his coronation, the poet was carried into the monastery of St. Onofrio for the purpose, and there he died.

modestly affirmed he had too much value for paper to do so,—and I have too much value for time to tell *all* I know; but if I *did*,” said Magini, fixing his large lustrous eyes full on the Gonfaloniere, “I doubt the signor Bernardini would be the *least pleased*, of all present, with the accuracy of my knowledge.”

The Gonfaloniere’s cheek blenched, his lips quivered, and he reeled in his seat, like one seized with a sudden giddiness.

“Look to the Gonfaloniere,—he is not well,” said the Duke.

“Perfectly, I thank your Highness,” replied Martin Bernardini,—recovering himself—“but the night is hot—very hot,” added he, filling a large goblet of water.

“It *is* hot,” said the Duke, rising from table, and offering his hand to Bianca; “and, moreover, it wanes apace. But at all events, signors, as we must be astir by times for the wild boar chase to-morrow, we had best to bed early. So good night to all. Brother, good night—Signor Magini, ‘*felici notte.*’”

“Farewell! your Highness.”

“No—not farewell,” said Bianca, with a

smile, as she placed her small white hand in his, “ but ‘ a rivederla.’ ”

And, so saying, the Duke and Duchess left the hall, and were soon after followed by their guests.

The deep-toned clock of Poggio Cajano had tolled the second hour after midnight, when the household were summoned from their beds by the sudden and severe illness of the Grand Duke. When the two physicians always in attendance, entered the royal bed chamber, they found the Duchess supporting his head against her shoulder, while he was writhing in the most excruciating agony. And, in answer to the physician’s questions of where he felt the pain? he could only gasp out at broken intervals,

“ — I am—all—one pain !”

And these pains he continued to feel till about four in the morning, when he fell into an uneasy and feverish sleep, from which he awoke worse instead of better. This was on the morning of the 8th of October. Bianca and the Cardinal never quitted his bed-side. But, on the 10th, the Duchess herself was

seized with the same complaint; only accompanied by more horrible paroxysms of delirium, once—and only once—she had asked for Ghuriluzzo: but, although they did not tell her so, the poor dwarf had died in the most agonizing convulsions, the morning after the Grand Duke had been taken ill. Nothing could equal the unceasing kindness and attention of the Cardinal de Medici to both the sufferers:—but all was in vain; for on the morning of the 19th of October, at four o'clock, just eleven days from that on which he had been taken ill, Francesco de Medici expired; and the day after, at three in the afternoon, Bianca breathed her last!

Ere Ferdinando de Medici had thrown off his ecclesiastical habit, to assume the reins of government, Cardinal Dragoni had not only quitted Poggio Cajano, but Tuscany, for Rome, accompanied by his sister, signora della Torre, with whose assistance (under a feigned name), he hoped to serve his master, Philip of Spain, at the expense of the Venetian republic, as well at the Vatican, as he had done at Florence. Three hours after the news of the Grand Duke

and Duchess's death had reached the capital, a hideous old woman was seen running through the streets, vociferating that they had been poisoned ; and when the authorities, by the command of the Gonfaloniere, had orders to seize her, she eluded them all, by jumping from the Ponte Carraia into the Arno, beneath whose muddy waves she perished. But still the rumour ran that the Grand Duke and Duchess had been poisoned. In vain their bodies were publicly opened ; in vain the most natural causes were assigned for their death—some say proved—still a suspicion of the foul stain of murder attaches to the memory of the otherwise good Ferdinando de Medici, whose reign was one of the most glorious for Tuscany. His hatred for his sister-in-law, which he has immortalized, by styling her, even in some of his public edicts, “ LA DETESTABILE BIANCA,” with some wise historians, has been converted, or rather perverted, into a proof of his having poisoned her. Whereas, *I*, knowing the relief even these three words of abhorrence must have been to him, believe him innocent of ALL DEEDS.

The night after the royal funeral, a solitary mourner passed through the church of San Lorenzo, at Florence, into the Cappella de' Medici, and, kneeling before the tomb of Bianca Cappello, prayed and wept for half the night. There is no contamination in the grave—no adulation in tears. The mourner was Arianna.

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